

NELSON LEE

2¢



Amazing, gripping, thrilling—an exciting long complete yarn featuring Nelson Lee, famous detective, and the Night Hawk.

New Series No. 32.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 30th, 1933.

The **Fags' Union!**



NOTICE
A General Strike has been called by the Fags' Union and no fags will be available until a satisfactory agreement has been reached
W Handforth
(Pres.)

GENERAL STRIKE
by the St. Frank's
fags: causes and
effects:

**SENSATIONAL
REVELATIONS!**

shall have to do something about it—so that it doesn't happen again. It's awfully decent of you to pay any attention to us fags at all."

"My job is to coach you youngsters, and I'm pleased

to see that you are keen," replied Freeman. "When I'm not engaged with the older boys, I'm only too glad to give you a hand. Let me know how you get on, won't you?"

He strolled away, and Willy clenched his fists. Lessons were over, and, according to his instructions, every member of the Third Form XI should have turned up for practice. And not one was there—except himself!

"Something's got to be done—and something drastic!" muttered Willy fiercely. "Freeman's thinking that my men aren't keen. But he's wrong. I know why the chaps haven't turned up. Anyhow, I think I know!"

He raced off. There was no sense in remaining on Little Side by himself. Arriving in the Triangle, he caught sight of Chubby Heath.

"No good jumping down my throat, Willy!" said Chubby, as Willy ran up. "Biggleswade collared me—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Willy. "So Biggleswade collared you, did he? Didn't you explain that you were wanted for practice? Didn't you tell him that there were other fags ready for duty?"

CHAPTER 1.

Willy on the Warpath!

"**W**ELL?" said Wally Freeman questioningly.

Willy Handforth, the cheery young skipper of the Third Form at St. Frank's, looked at the St. Frank's football coach with a grim, fighting light in his eyes.

"They're not here, Mr. Freeman," he said briefly.

"I can see that, can't I?" said the coach. "What's the matter with your men, anyhow? I thought you told me they were keen? I thought you said that you wanted your fags' eleven to be something this year?"

Willy breathed hard. He and the famous ex-International footballer were standing at the far end of Little Side. This section of the extensive St. Frank's playing fields was regarded by the Third Form as its own private property. The turf wasn't particularly good—the seniors, in fact, regarded this patch as a wilderness—but it was good enough for the Third.

"Sorry to have brought you out here for nothing, Mr. Freeman," said Willy. "I

"Of course I did, but you know what Biggy is," growled Chubby Heath. "He says there's no other fag who can light a fire like I can, and he wouldn't listen to me. And Biggy, after all, is decent. I tried cheeking him, but it didn't work. He only laughed and told me to cut."

Juicy Lemon came running up. His first name was really Christopher, but the Third had heard it only once. Once was enough.

"Can't you do something about this, Willy?" he asked plaintively. "Just as I was coming across to Little Side I was grabbed by Conroy major. Young Dexter was with me, and I told Conroy that I was wanted for footer and that Dexter wasn't, but it made no difference. Conroy grabbed me."

"I'll go and see Conroy—and Biggleswade, too!" said Willy ferociously.

BIGGLESWADE, of the Sixth, was giving a little party in his study. Reynolds and Mills were coming over from the Modern House. Biggleswade turned round with a host-like smile as his study door opened. But it was only Willy Handforth.

"I want a word with you, Biggy," said Willy grimly.

"You can clear out!" retorted Biggleswade. "I'm expecting some visitors——"

"Exactly," said Willy. "You're expecting visitors, and you collar Chubby Heath to light your fire and get the tea ready, don't you? Didn't Chubby tell you that he was wanted for footer practice?"

"He might have done," replied the prefect, staring. "What if he did? And not so much of your cheek, my lad!"

"I'm not cheeky—I'm only wild!" replied Willy. "How the dickens do you think I can get up a Third Form footer team if you seniors pinch all my men? It's been like it every day this week! Whenever I try to get my team together they're doing errands—fagging for you chaps."

"Fags are here to be fagged," said Biggleswade.

"I know that—but if we only work together there'd be none of this trouble," said Willy. "There were plenty of other kids waiting, weren't there? Why must you pick on Chubby? Wouldn't Gates have done? Or Blythe?"

"I'm awfully sorry, old son, but your troubles bore me," replied the Sixth-Former good-naturedly. "When I want Heath, I have Heath—and I'm not being put off with a young idiot like Gates. Heath knows my ways, and I can trust him."

"And what about our football?" demanded Willy hotly.

"Sorry, kid, but I think I can hear my guests coming," said Biggy. "This pains me more than it does you, but I can assure you it's necessary."

He flung open the door, seized Willy firmly by the scruff of the neck, and booted him out into the corridor.

"Nothing like it," remarked Reynolds, of the Modern House. "We do just the same over on our side. Whenever a fag gets cheeky there's only one remedy—the boot."

Willy controlled himself with difficulty. The seniors passed into the study and closed the door. So Willy went along and looked into Conroy major's study.

"Oh, here you are," said the Sixth-Former. "It's about time—— Hallo! I thought it was young Lemon back. What do you want, Handforth minor?" he added suspiciously.

"I want to tell you off!" replied Willy boldly. "You're a keen footballer, Conroy major, and you wouldn't be in the First Eleven now unless you had been playing hard ever since you were in the Third. How do you think I'm going to get my team into shape if they're never free for practice? Lemon was booked for Little Side this afternoon, and you grabbed him——"

"Of all the infernal sauce!" roared Conroy major. "Get out of this study, you young blighter!"

"If you'll only listen to me——"

"I've heard enough of your confounded cheek already!" snorted the prefect.

Biff! Slam!

Willy shot through the doorway, propelled by Conroy major's boot. The door slammed. The Third Form skipper picked himself up gingerly. He tried other senior studies, and at the end of five minutes he concluded that the game wasn't worth the candle. He had been booted out so many times that his rear was feeling the effects. The seniors, apparently, had only one way with fags.

"That's done it!" panted Willy, as he picked himself up for the sixth time. "That's absolutely and definitely done it! The rotters! I go to them in a reasonable mood and they won't even listen to me! All right! They've asked for trouble—and they'll get it!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Manifesto!

MR. ALINGTON WILKES, turning the corner of the Sixth Form passage, beheld Willy Handforth picking himself up. Willy walked towards him with a peculiarly awkward gait—which, in itself, was eloquent enough.

"Trouble, old man?" asked the House-master sympathetically.

Willy's eyes burned. Mr. Wilkes was different—he was a sportsman. He would understand. But Willy hesitated. A fellow couldn't very well sneak.

"It's nothing, sir," he growled. "Just a bit of bother with some of these seniors."

A door opened and a prefect looked out.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

"You still here, young Handforth?" he demanded warmly. "I thought I booted you out, and told you— Oh, hallo, sir! Didn't know you were here, sir."

"What has this youngster been doing?" asked Mr. Wilkes.

"Cheeking the whole Sixth Form passage, by what I can understand, sir," replied the prefect. "He's had the nerve to come here and kick up a fuss because we've been using the fags. It's like his cheek to question our authority. Fagging is a recognised system at St. Frank's, and——"

"Wait a minute!" broke in Willy grimly. "I never questioned your authority to fag us. I'm all in favour of it myself; it does the chaps good to do a bit of work. But it's a pity you can't use the chaps who are waiting to be fagged, and not pick on the members of my footer eleven. As long as some of us are always ready, I don't see what you've got to grumble about."

"That seems perfectly fair," remarked Mr. Wilkes mildly.

"What do these fags know about football, sir?" asked the prefect with impatience.

"They'll know nothing if you keep them from practice, old man," replied the House-master gently. "I don't want to take sides in this affair, but it certainly seems to me that there ought to be some amicable way of arranging matters."

He walked on, and the prefect shrugged his shoulders and went back into his study. Willy followed Mr. Wilkes.

"I wasn't going to say anything about it, sir, but Wilson chipped in just at the right minute," he said, falling into step. "I'm not grouching against the fagging system, and I'll see that the chaps do their duties. But all this week I've been trying to get my team together, and every time half the chaps are kept away. I went to Little Side this afternoon, and not a single man turned up! Mr. Freeman was there, too, and he was made to look a fool. Is that right, sir?"

"All your men were fagging, I take it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, much as I sympathise with you, I must remind you that you're always liable to be called upon——"

"But not the team, sir!" broken in Willy quickly. "The other chaps, yes. As long as we leave plenty of fags on duty while we're at practice, what the dickens does it matter to the seniors? But they won't look at it that way—they pick on certain fags, their own favourites, and the result is I can never get my team together."

"H'm! Rather an awkward situation, old son," said Mr. Wilkes. "As long as there are fags available for duty, I really don't see what the seniors have to grumble about. I can quite understand your desperation."

Willy took the plunge.

"I've got a wheeze, sir," he confided. "Will you let me settle this matter myself—in my own way? I promise I won't transgress any of the traditions of the school, but

there might be a bit of bother. If there is, can I rely upon you to wink at it?"

Mr. Wilkes' eyes twinkled.

"You've touched my weak spot, old chap—I was never any good at riddles," he replied. "I think you'd better cut off."

Willy cut—mentally deciding that "Old Wilkey" was a brick.

"A UNION," said Willy calmly. "That's the ticket, my sons! Unity is strength, and if we only stick together, and stand up for our rights, we'll soon have these giddy seniors eating out of our hands."

The Third listened, half-scared by the daring of this suggestion, but unquestionably thrilled. It was a full meeting of the Form, and Willy Handforth was presiding with his usual efficiency.

"A union, eh?" said Chubby Heath in an awed voice. "Isn't that a bit thick? The seniors would never stand for it."

"They'd have to," retorted Willy. "But a union can only succeed if we all bind ourselves to stick to the rules. This union isn't designed to rob the seniors of their rights, but to stop the abuse of them. Things have got to a pass. These giddy seniors are picking on certain fags because they're more efficient than others. That doesn't come within the code. The seniors are supposed to take any fag who's available."

"And will this union make them do it?" asked Owen minor dubiously.

"It will," replied Willy grimly. "There'll be no more picking and choosing—no more taking football players when they're required on the field. We've got to share the work between us, my sons."

"It's about time we had a union, then," said Chubby Heath. "Some of us are fagged morning, noon, and night; and others—the duffers—never get fagged at all. Do you mean to say that this union will even things up all round?"

"That's just what it's designed for," said Willy calmly. "I'm getting out a manifesto, and I'll take it round to all the seniors myself. Organisation, my sons! That's the wheeze! We'll have certain fixed times for our fagging duties. Some of us will be on the job, say, from four till six; others from six till eight. We can change about, too, and vary the order. It's only a matter of arranging."

"And those seniors will be dished properly!" grinned Juicy Lemon. "My hat! Let's have a look at that manifesto!"

Willy produced it. In its own way, it was a masterpiece. Clearly, concisely, it laid down its tenets; it stated that there would always be fags ready for duty, but that no special fags were to be selected. Each fag would have his own duty-hours, and if he shirked his duties he would be punished—not by the seniors, but by the union.

The Third thought that the manifesto was a masterpiece. The Sixth held a different opinion; they thought it was a consummate piece of cheek. Willy took it round to all the senior studies, and that evening, in the Senior Day Room, one or two comments were made.

"Manifesto?" said Wilson, when somebody brought up the subject. "I chucked it in the fire."

Nobody in the Sixth considered that memorable document worthy of any further consideration. The fire was obviously the place for it.

CHAPTER 3.

The Strike!

"F A-A-A-AG!"

Wilson, of the Sixth, opening his study door, bawled at the top of his voice. It was the following afternoon, and lessons were over. Gates, of the Third, shot round the corner and arrived breathless.



The St. Frank's seniors charged on to the field and the rebellious fags were dragged unceremoniously away.

"Yes, Wilson, please?" he panted.

"I don't want you!" said Wilson curtly. "Where's Owen minor? He knows I always want him about tea-time."

"Owen minor isn't on duty now, Wilson," faltered Gates.

"Not on duty?" snapped the senior. "What the deuce—"

"It's—it's this new union, please, Wilson," said the fag. "Owen minor doesn't come on duty until six o'clock, so you can't have him. But I'll do anything you want, Wilson."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Wilson grimly. "I suppose you kid yourself that you can make tea as well as Owen minor? And toast muffins the same as he does?"

"I'll try, Wilson," said Gates eagerly.

"You won't experiment on my tea—or my muffins," retorted Wilson. "So the union has had the confounded nerve to start, has it? Where's Owen minor?"

"He's off duty—"

"I know that!" roared Wilson aggressively. "Where is he?"

"Please, Wilson, he's on Little Side at footer practice—"

Wilson did not wait to hear any more. He strode purposefully down the corridor, and came upon Conroy major and Biggleswade and two or three other seniors in an excited group. Wilson needed no telling what was the matter.

"Young Handforth's at the bottom of this," Conroy major was saying. "Do these darned fags think that we're going to put

up with the duffers they've left on duty? Young Lemon is my fag—he knows my ways—and I'm not going to be palmed off with any substitutes."

"Same here," said one of the other Sixth-Formers. "Blythe is the kid I need—and Blythe isn't here. I never heard of such impudence."

"You'd better come with me," said Wilson. "It's ten to one that your fags are fooling about on Little Side. We've got to teach these kids what's what. Then they'll understand, once and for all, that we're not putting up with any of this nonsense."

In the Triangle they ran into Frinton and Stanhope of the West House, and they

hadn't gone far before they caught up with Sinclair and Payne of the East House. Prefects from all over the school, it seemed, were converging upon Little Side. Willy had flung down the gauntlet, and the Sixth-Formers were accepting the challenge. Their plan was to nip the rebellion in the bud.

They certainly had a good shot at it. Charging on to the fags' playing-field, they found Willy Handforth hard at it with his merry men. They were practising under the critical eye of Wally Freeman. The St. Frank's coach frowned as the seniors butted in.

"Just a minute, young gentlemen—" he began.

"Awfully sorry to disturb you, Mr. Freeman, but these fags are wanted," said Wilson curtly. "You wouldn't dream of butting into an affair like this, would you?" he added politely, but in such a tone that Mr. Freeman was left in no doubt as to his best course.

The seniors acted drastically. They marched on to the field, grabbed their "special" fags, and calmly hauled them away by the scruff of their necks. Willy was treated just the same as the others. Any sort of fight was, of course, impossible. Striking a prefect meant a thrashing, anyhow.

The fags submitted tamely, but with an inward sense of injustice—a burning anger at the unwritten law which forbade them to hit back. Ignominiously they were whirled indoors and set to work.

"That's the way to deal with these silly rebellions," said Wilson triumphantly.

The other seniors chuckled. The union was squashed already. Within ten minutes of the fag footballers having been dragged in, they were working as usual—and it was gratifying to the seniors to find that the work was done efficiently.

"FA-A-A-AG!"

It was the quiet hour before calling-over. Tea was finished and forgotten, and there was nothing much doing. Conroy major, opening his study door, bawled in the approved style. But there was no answering scuttle of feet.

"Fa-a-a-ag!" bellowed Conroy major again.

Only the echo of his own voice came back to him. He caught in his breath with anger and strode down the corridor to the alcove. This alcove was the fags' corner. It was another unwritten law that there should always be five or six fags waiting here, ready for any jobs that were required.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Conroy major blankly.

The fags' corner was empty. But on the wall there was a sheet of exercise paper, fastened by a drawing-pin. It was brief and to the point:

"NOTICE.

"A General Strike has been called by the Fags' Union, and no fags will be available until a satisfactory agreement has been reached.

"W. HANDFORTH (Pres.)."

Conroy major read the notice again, gasped, and then yelled at the top of his voice. Other seniors, coming out to see what ailment Conroy major had suddenly contracted, gathered round the notice in an excited mob. In the indignation of the moment they even forgot their dignity.

"Outrageous!" snorted Wilson. "A strike, eh? I want a fag now—to go to the village for me. Where the dickens are the young beggars?"

"We'll separate and make a search," suggested Biggleswade.

They separated, and they searched, but not a fag was to be found. The seniors, who had so recently congratulated themselves upon the way in which they had "scotched" the union, now changed their minds.

The fags, apparently, were organised thoroughly. In fact, so thoroughly that they were holding their strike well out of reach of the seniors. The seniors crowded indoors and held an impromptu meeting. Something would have to be done. Unless they were careful, they would become the laughing stock of the school.

"Anything wrong with you chaps?" asked Handforth, of the Remove, when he met some Sixth-Formers in the Junior passage.

"Do you know where the fags are?" asked Wilson darkly. "You're not hiding them in your studies, by any chance?"

"My dear chap, what an idea!" said Nipper, the Remove captain, as he looked out of Study C. "Come and search, if you want to. For your information, however, we're not taking any part in this little quarrel of yours."

"And good luck to the fags!" drawled Travers. "I like to see 'em standing up for their rights. Why shouldn't they play football if they want to?"

The seniors snorted, conveying the idea that they entirely disagreed with Travers' views on the subject.

CHAPTER 4.

Wilson's Little Blunder!

VERA WILKES laughed gleefully.

"It's marvellous, Annie!" she declared. "I've never seen anything so topping—and you don't look a year older than twelve. It's amazing what a difference clothes make."

Anybody entering Vera's bed-room at that moment would have been certain that her companion was a meek-looking boy—almost a child. The Etons fitted perfectly, and

Running up, Willy Handforth and Vera were just in time to see a figure hurtle out of the study, propelled by a large boot!



from tip to toe "he" looked a typical fag of the more timid kind.

Actually, Annie Russell was a Moor View girl of fifteen. She had come home with Vera half an hour earlier, and a transformation had been made. The fact that Annie had an Eton-cropped head made the disguise all the easier. She was small, too, and was, incidentally, one of the star performers of the Moor View Amateur Dramatic Society.

"It's awfully decent of you, Vera, to get these togs for me," she said gratefully. "I think they'll do a treat. I'd better get them off now—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Vera, her eyes twinkling.

She was the Housemaster's daughter, and, as such, felt that she could easily afford to take a chance. She didn't board at Moor View like the other girls, but was only a day-girl—her own home being so near.

"It was easy enough for me to bag that suit from one of the boy's lockers," she said, chuckling. "But look here, Annie. Why not put this to the test? You're going to play the part of a boy in that show of yours, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, you haven't been at Moor View long, and I don't think you know many of the St. Frank's chaps," said Vera. "Let's stroll out together, and I'll pretend that you're a cousin of mine, or somebody like that. And if the chaps accept you as a boy, it'll prove pretty well that you'll be a big success in the part."

Annie burst out laughing.

"I'm game!" she said promptly. "I say, what a lark!"

She looked meek enough, but she was as full of "nerve" as any schoolboy. The idea of fooling the St. Frank's chaps appealed to her sense of humour.

"I'll tell you what, though," she went on. "Wouldn't it be a lot better if I wandered into the boys' quarters on my own?"

"My hat! You wouldn't dare!"

"But it would be a lot better!" insisted Annie. "Some of these chaps are pretty keen, you know, and they might suspect things if they saw me with you. Far better let me go alone, and I'll pretend to be a new kid."

"That's all very well, but where do I come in?" asked Vera, with a grimace. "I shall miss all the fun. Still, I think you're right. What a laugh we'll have on the

chaps later—when they find out who you really are!”

“Rather!” chuckled Annie gleefully.

GEORGE WILSON, of the Sixth, halted in his tracks as he turned into the Fifth Form passage. He had caught sight of a figure at the far end. It was the figure of a boy in Etons; and very obviously a fag.

“Hi!” roared Wilson.

Annie Russell halted, startled. She hadn't found the Junior quarters yet, and was, in fact, lost. Wilson was the first fellow she had seen; and, knowing that he was one of the lordly seniors, she did her utmost to avoid him. But it was too late. Wilson came striding up.

“And who do you happen to be?” he asked, laying a heavy hand on the disguised girl's shoulder. “I don't think I've seen you before, have I?”

“I—I don't think so,” faltered Annie.

“New kid, eh?” said Wilson. “A fag, too. That's lucky—because I'm looking for a fag.”

“But—but, please, I really can't stop

“Oh, can't you?” snapped Wilson. “That's just too bad! What's your name?”

“Russell.”

“All right, Russell, you'll come with me,” said Wilson firmly. “I'll show you how

much I think of your precious Fags' Union! By the time I've finished with you you'll wish you hadn't listened to that young monkey of a Handforth minor.”

Annie was startled. She hadn't the remotest idea what Wilson meant by his reference to a Fags' Union, but she was shrewd enough to guess that the St. Frank's fags were neglecting their duties. To explain matters meant the spoiling of her plan before she had got really going; and, after all, what was wrong with testing her disguise on this arrogant senior? It might be just as much a lark as her original scheme.

“Come on,” said Wilson curtly.

He seized her by the scruff of the neck, and gave her such a jolt forward that she nearly pitched head over heels. She wasn't accustomed to being handled like that, and it came as a shock. However, it was all in the game. Pulling herself together, she went with Wilson to the latter's study.

Wilson suspected nothing. This fag was new to him, and he looked a meek little beggar. A senior couldn't be expected to keep stock of every new kid who arrived; and the fact that Wilson had bagged a fag when fags were at a premium prevented him from being too inquisitive.

“Now then, you can get busy on those footer boots of mine,” said the prefect, pointing to the fender. “Scrape all that mud



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off them, and clean 'em. After that, you can wash up these dishes and tidy up the study. If you make a mess of things, my son, I'll give you a clout."

And Wilson, immensely relieved that he had found somebody to do the work, flung himself into the easy chair and started reading.

Annie looked at the boots, she looked at

NEXT WEEK'S ST. FRANK'S YARN—

the dirty dishes, and a fresh twinkle came into her eyes. There might be some sport in this adventure, after all!

CHAPTER 5.

William, the Conqueror!

S CRAPE, scrape, scrape!

There was silence in Wilson's study except for the sounds made by the new "fag" as "he" cleaned the football boots. Something rather peculiar in the sound caused Wilson to look up.

"Be careful with them, you know," he said. "They were only new last week, and— What the— Here, you young idiot!" he bellowed, leaping to his feet. "What do you think you're doing to those boots of mine?"

"P-please, I'm scraping them," faltered Annie timidly.

"Scraping them?" gasped Wilson. "You've ruined them!"

This was an exaggeration, but it was certainly a fact that the sharp-pointed table knife had marred the appearance of the boots very considerably. There were long scratches all over the leather, and, incidentally, the floor was littered with mud. Wilson nearly exploded.

"You hopeless young donkey!" he shouted. "Take that! I've a darned good mind to give you a swishing."

He gave Annie a clout with the back of his hand. She fairly shrieked at the unexpectedness of it, and staggered away, her left ear burning, her whole face coloured.

"Stop that!" snapped Wilson, staring. "You silly kid! I didn't hurt you. What's the idea of screaming like a silly girl? Get on with those dishes before I lose my temper!"

Wilson wasn't a bully, but clouting a fag was a senior's privilege. He had been really startled at that feminine scream, yet even now he had no suspicion of the truth. A number of fags were the owners of falsetto voices.

"You—you hurt me!" said Annie tearfully.

"Rot! Wash those dishes!"

He picked a ruler from the table, and lightly flicked the girl with it—one of his playful little amusements. The flat of a ruler can be quite painful when scientifically applied, and Wilson was an expert.

"Oh!" cried Annie, leaping a foot into the air.

"Never knew such a kid for making a fuss," growled the prefect. "I can hardly touch you without your screaming like a silly girl."

Annie boiled inwardly. So this was the way these St. Frank's seniors treated their fags! She picked up a couple of plates, pretended to stumble, and dropped them on the floor. They shivered to atoms with an alarming crash.

"Here, I say!" ejaculated Wilson.

"P-please, you made me nervous!" whispered Annie. "Look, I can't hold anything in my hands."

She picked up two cups, and her hands were shaking so violently that they dropped before Wilson could rescue them. They shared the fate of the plates.

"You young monkey, you're doing it deliberately!" yelled the prefect. "By Jove, I'll bet this is one of young Handforth's stunts! And I was mug enough to fall for it! Get out of here!"

He flung open the door, and with a quick grab he seized the startled girl. With the accuracy of long experience he planted his boot firmly and squarely in the right place—and Annie sailed through the doorway as many a fag had sailed before her.

VERA WILKES was not only puzzled, but very worried.

She had waited patiently, and she had kept her eyes open, but since Annie had gone downstairs she hadn't seen a sign of her. Vera was now in the Ancient House lobby wondering what to do.

"Waiting for somebody, Miss Vera?" asked Willy Handforth, as he came in with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. "If there's anything we can do—"

Vera explained, and Willy grinned. Then an alarmed light suddenly entered his eyes.

"This is serious!" gasped Willy. "We've got a fags' strike on, and it's a ten to one chance that your girl friend's been collared by some prefect and put through the hoop! They're all as mad as hatters because we've gone on strike. Come on! We'd better dash for the Sixth Form passage!"

—WILL BE AN EXTRA-LONG ONE!

Vera, filled with wild alarm, ran as hard as the fags. They could not have arrived in the Sixth Form passage at a more opportune moment. They actually saw the door of Wilson's study open; they saw Annie sail out; and they saw the object which had propelled her. Wilson's boot was a large one.

Vera ran up, her eyes blazing. Wilson, confronted by this indignant young lady, started back in consternation.

"You brute!" cried Vera. "You kicked her! I saw you! You kicked her out of your study!"

(Continued on page 27.)

By
**JOHN
BREARLEY**

Who CAN write
a story that
THRILLS!

CHAPTER I.

Ambushed on Exmoor!

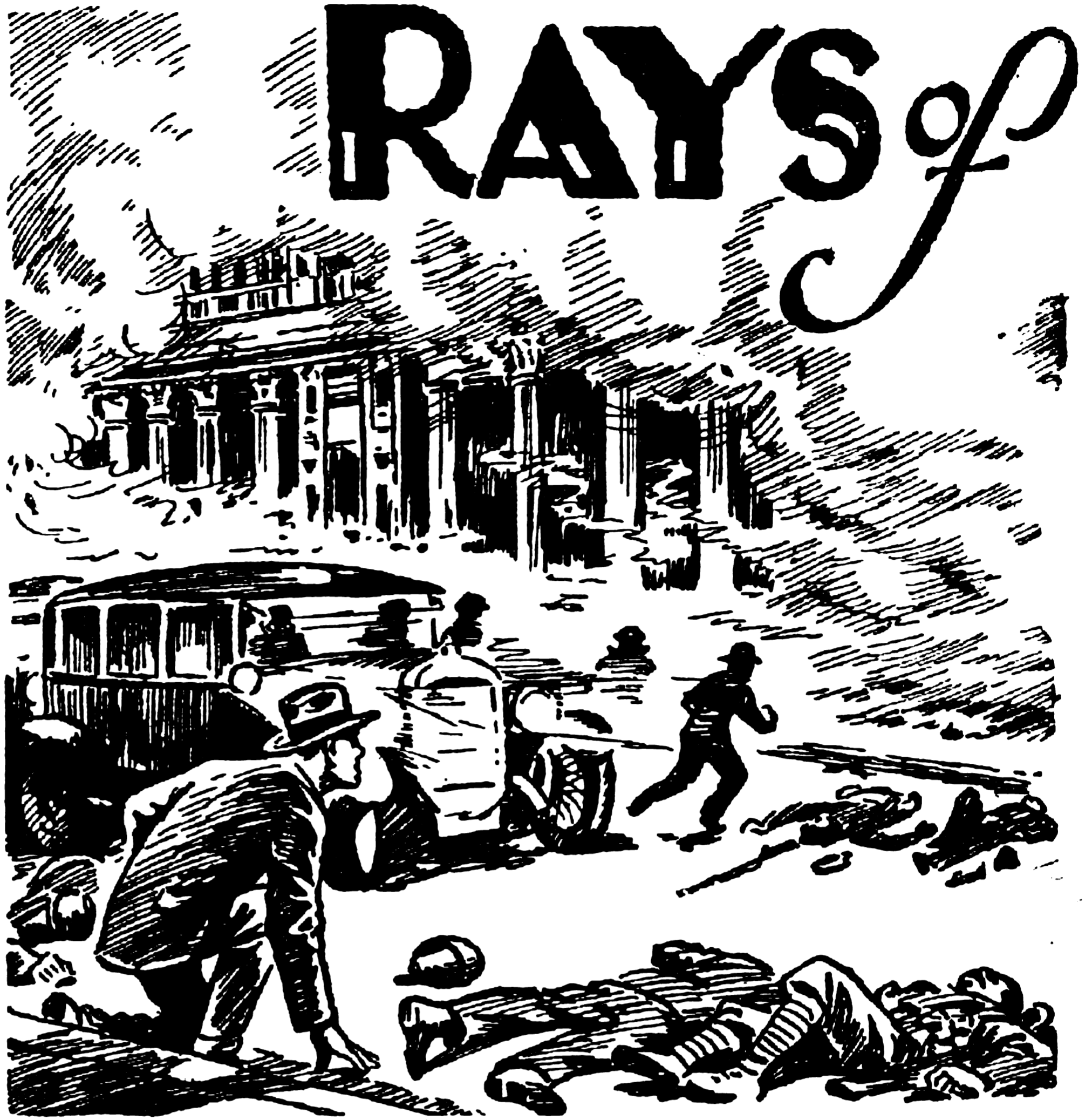
A CROSS the desolate wilderness of Exmoor, with a flaming sunset behind him, came Nelson Lee in his Rolls-Royce Special, roaring along the lonely road at glorious speed. For the famous detective was heading for London—in a hurry.

He had been engaged on an important case in the West of England, having obtained leave from St. Franks, of which famous school he was the headmaster. Nipper, his young assistant, who was a pupil at the school, had also been granted special leave, and the celebrated detective had left him in charge of his chambers at Gray's Inn Road. That evening Lee had received a telegram from London.

The wire was from Scotland Yard itself, bearing the name of Chief Detective-inspector Lennard. And there was an urgency in that usually

stolid official's message that made Lee—who, fortunately, had brought his case to a successful

conclusion—turn the nose of the Rolls-Royce Londonwards on the instant. Like a silver streak she shot across Ex-



moor, whose heather-strewn plain lost itself on either side in the mists of distance.

Lounging comfortably in his driving-seat, Nelson Lee was enjoying the swift rush through the cool evening air. Work was ahead; but meanwhile he had a beautiful racer, and all this quiet moorland over which to let her out. He made her fly.

Just ahead, and partly hidden by a rugged, purple hillock, the deserted highway took a sharp bend—one of the few in all its long, straight miles—and with a little smile of pleasure curving his firm lips, he touched the wheel and took the corner at dizzy speed.

And in doing so he saw something that dashed the colour from his cheeks in a flash. Beyond the corner, square in the centre of the road, squatted a huge granite boulder!

The next few seconds became a hectic, crashing nightmare. With a hideous smash the great Rolls hurtled into the obstruction, her near-side wheels leaping high into the

DEATH!



Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk join forces . . . against a criminal who is out to make himself **MASTER OF THE WORLD**

five guns covering him spoke a message that he could not ignore. Coolness came back in a single second, and as usual in a crisis, his brain began to work at lightning speed. He was cornered, and he knew it. His powerful car was scrap-iron now, and any hope of help on Exmoor at this hour of evening was a waste of time. His hands went up slowly.

The men closed in warily. They were an ugly crew. Who they were the detective had no idea—as yet; but they must have been watching his movements very closely to have prepared such a daring ambush. It had been a swiftly-planned one, too; there was fresh dirt on the fatal boulder where it had been torn from its moorland bed and rolled into the road, probably a few minutes only before he turned the hidden corner. Also,

only an hour had elapsed since Lennard's telegram had reached him.

"Must have heard me cancel

air. Lee felt the car rise sickeningly, and iron-nerved and steel-wristed, tried to right her. As he did so he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the heathered hillock burst into a dozen points of flame and felt the hiss of bullets streaking past him.

Crack, crack, cra-a-ck!

They tore into the car like hail. The wind-screen disappeared into fragments; the detective felt a sharp sting as a flying spearhead of glass ploughed across his forehead, and then he lost control entirely.

As if thrown carelessly aside by a giant hand, the car skidded madly off the road, ploughed into the rough moorland, and, to a last shuddering roar, turned a complete somersault. By a miracle only was the detective flung clear.

Out of the hillock across the road five masked men appeared, swift and lithe as panthers. All were armed.

"Stick 'em up, Lee!"

Half-dazed, Nelson Lee stumbled to his feet. His hand flashed to his hip-pocket; but he did not withdraw his automatic. The

my rooms at the hotel!" he thought even as his foes came nearer. "And as this is the only road home, the rest was easy providing they acted quickly! Which they have!" he concluded ruefully.

He had been badly shaken by the disaster, and blood from his wound was trickling into his eyes. But he stared at the men defiantly.

"Well, shoot and get it over!" he said with a contemptuous smile; whereat one of the attackers grunted.

"No, thanks—not yet!" he sneered. "We want you alive, Mr. Nelson Lee, although we had to take the risk of killing you just now. Shut up!" he snapped harshly as Lee started to reply. "Come on, boys—snap into it!"

Rough hands grabbed the detective; his wrists were twisted behind his back and handcuffed. He was disarmed, after which he was gagged and his legs bound securely. The leader whistled shrilly, and a second later a long, grey car came bouncing cautiously over the rugged moor from behind the hillock. Lee was picked up and thrown inside.

There was a roar from the engine; a smooth, expert change of gears. Swiftly and silently the car settled to its stride and sped away over Exmoor into the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER 2.

The Ice Ray!

OF the long journey that followed, Nelson Lee had only the haziest idea. His forehead burnt like fire, and his head ached and swam with the constant vibration of the car.

At a terrific speed, save when they slowed down to pass through lighted towns, they hummed along in silence, for although he strained his ears to listen, his captors barely exchanged a word during the whole run.

He fell at last into a stupor, waking after what seemed an eternity as the car slackened almost to a crawl. From the noise of the traffic around, and the brilliance of passing lights the detective guessed they were in a big city—London, probably—and a hundred ideas for attracting attention began to seethe in his brain.

His helpless plight, however, was all too obvious, and one by one he rejected the schemes. Presently the car turned away from the busier thoroughfares and sped faster through a network of darker streets until it stopped altogether.

One of the men got out, and Nelson Lee heard him knock at a door. He was back again a minute later, and as deftly as they had stowed the detective away, the men hauled him out of the car and hurried him across a cobbled drive. He had an instant's glimpse of high buildings lost against the blackness of the sky; then a door clicked behind them and complete darkness blotted everything out.

It was obvious, though, that the men knew their way, for they marched on without hesitation, up some stairs and into a

room, where they pitched their prisoner heavily into an unseen armchair. Limp and shaken though he was, all Lee's senses were alert, and one by one he heard all save the leader tiptoe swiftly from the room.

He could not see a thing; the darkness was so intense that it seemed to press down on him like a terrible weight. And yet, although his eyes were useless, he knew that other men were present besides the one who stood near him. He could hear soft breathing and the gentle rustle of garments; there was a faint animal smell, too, in the stale, heavy air.

His hands clenched tightly in their manacles. He would have given anything then for just the faintest gleam of light: for the brooding silence in the room was charged with vague horror; as though someone—or something—close at hand was preparing to spring.

So intense was the feeling that the detective sighed faintly with relief when, out of the darkness, came a quiet human voice:

"Well, Karl?"

To Nelson Lee's surprise, the rough, harsh tones of his captor were almost servile as he answered:

"We have brought Nelson Lee, Master!"

Lee tried to sit up quietly, straining his eyes until they ached. A hand swept out of nowhere and pushed him back, and he heard Karl shuffle farther into the room and begin a whispered report of the ambush.

Once again the quiet voice spoke:

"Very well, Karl. But your method was crude and stupid; you might have killed the specimen outright. In which case, Karl, you would have taken his place!"

"Your pardon, Master!" grovelled the man humbly.

"'Tis granted—now! Do better next time. Remove the specimen's gag and go!"

The hand that fumbled about Nelson Lee's face trembled violently. Whoever the voice was, his servants evidently feared him right down to their souls: men like Karl did not cringe to anyone without good reason! The gag was slipped from the detective's face, there was a quick patter of feet and the sound of a closing door.

Nelson Lee was left in inky darkness with his foe—or foes!

"And now," said the voice calmly, "good-evening, Nelson Lee!"

Nelson Lee smiled grimly. Despite the dark weirdness of the situation, he had himself well in hand, and his own voice was firm as he answered:

"Good-evening—whoever you may be. May I ask what this means, and who you are?"

"You may." The sound of someone rising from a chair followed, and the voice was full of a sombre dignity when it spoke again: "I am the Master of the World!"

Nelson Lee bit his lip. Years of training had given him uncanny powers of observation, and although the voice sounded

strong and well-controlled, his acute ears caught a quiver of some violent emotion underlying the calmly bombastic words; such a quiver as shakes the voices of highly-strung men—or maniacs!

Thoughtful seconds went by before he answered mockingly:

"I see. Congratulations, your Majesty!"

"You are pleased to be humorous, Nelson Lee!" returned the voice coldly. "I think we shall change that. For presently I intend to kill you!"

Once again the room was hushed and still. But soon, as Nelson Lee made no reply, the voice continued:

"I propose to kill you because you are a clever man; and because you are one of the few who may be dangerous. A graceful compliment, is it not?"

"Thank you!" replied Lee dryly.

"I have brought you here to show you the methods whereby I intend to make myself Master of the World. The demonstration will, I fear, be somewhat disastrous to yourself. But at least you have the consolation of knowing that you, Nelson Lee, the great detective, will be the first sacrifice!"

Nelson Lee nodded to himself. He had no doubts now—the man in the darkness was mad; starkly, dangerously mad. The voice was beginning to lose its evenness; that tell-tale quiver was rapidly gaining the upper hand. He received a shock as his thoughts were fathomed with marvellous accuracy.

"You think I am mad, Nelson Lee? Perhaps I am—by ordinary standards. But—it is a glorious madness; a madness that soars, flames, destroys; a madness that enables science to eat up the world—smash empires, armies; place all humanity beneath my heel. Under *my* rule—I, the Master of the World!"

The voice rose swiftly to an hysterical shriek that smashed the silence to shreds and echoed within the closed room. It died away into heavy, emotional sobs, and now Nelson Lee could hear another voice speaking in gentle, soothing tones that presently had the desired effect. The laboured breathing of the Master grew easier; uncanny silence ruled the darkness as before.

Nelson Lee lay back in his chair and waited.

A sharp click, followed by a low, musical hum made him flex his muscles alertly. His eyes flashed. For the first time a gleam of something approaching light was shining through the Stygian blackness around him.

On the floor, near the doorway, a small pool of glowing green light had suddenly appeared. He could not tell from which direction it came, for it had no beam; there was just the luminous green splash, moving stealthily as though searching for something.

He held his breath, expecting to hear the Master's voice again. But nothing stirred; the room was as still and as death-like as a vault. Only the unearthly gleam crept

slowly towards his feet, closer and closer, until at last it reached him, and stopped, bathing his bound legs in a sinister glare.

Then it began to creep along his body!

CHAPTER 3.

Wings in the Darkness!

SPELLBOUND with nameless horror, Nelson Lee watched the green ray rising. His first sensation, as it slowly climbed, was one of terrific cold; already his feet and legs were numbed to the bone and dead. He felt his muscles lock and harden, his limbs grow rigid. Gradually, like some disembodied spirit, the green light crawled higher, freezing him inch by inch into a statue!

"When it reaches my heart it will kill me!" he thought dully. But the light still climbed until it shone on his shoulders, his neck and his face—and he was still alive. Strong man though he was, he could endure the nerve-wracking sight no longer: he closed his eyes, feeling the light pass over them. He heard another click, and the humming sound ceased.

By a great effort he managed to open his eyelids even as they, too, began to stiffen. Complete darkness filled the room once more. The ghoulish light had disappeared. As in a dream he heard the Master of the World speaking again:

"Are you interested in light-science, Nelson Lee?" he asked gravely. "I call that my Ice Ray; a ray that will paralyse one man, one hundred men, a million! And by its aid I can shatter crowds, armies, continents!"

Lee tried to answer, to hurl some defiance into the teeth of this madman of the darkness; but couldn't. He discovered that his head was clear, and that he could think and hear plainly; yet from head to toe his body seemed encased in invisible bonds of ice-cold steel. He could not speak or move a muscle.

Once more the Master read his thoughts correctly.

"Do not struggle, Nelson Lee! Your brain is still active, but your nerve centres are frozen. The ray is not fatal—unless I make it so. In the ordinary way, you would recover from this in two hours. But you, my dear Lee, will not last two hours!"

Nelson Lee heard the Master of the World rise to his feet again, and in that moment the detective made the mightiest effort of his life to break his bonds; to writhe, struggle, do anything to rid himself of the ghastly chill that held him in a vice. It was useless; though his brain still functioned, his limbs were powerless. An inhuman, mocking laugh sobered him at last.

"And now, Nelson Lee, we come to the second demonstration—my Fire Ray. The ray that will eat through—anything; from proof steel to reinforced concrete. I think it will interest you!

"Above this building, Lee, is a chimney

stack, one of the highest in London. I wrote to Scotland Yard yesterday saying that I proposed to destroy it, in order to afford them a proof of my power. Whether they have heeded my warning, I neither know nor care. You, my dear Lee"—the voice took on a grisly benevolence—"will take a leading part in the performance—which begins now!"

A soft whistle followed the words, and now Nelson Lee heard something which set his heart racing furiously: the soft pad of animal feet and the click of long claws on the stone floor.

He felt something prowl towards him and bend down, felt a whiff of hot, fetid breath on his cheeks, and a hairy arm slid unseen out of the darkness, around his neck. Two great hands plucked him out of the chair as though he was a feather, and his head was pillowed in a vast, hairy bosom.

There came a low whisper of command, and the Thing that held him turned obediently and began to shuffle towards the door. Nelson Lee heard other footsteps following.

Down the dark stairs he was borne again, through a passage and a door. A gust of night air and the far-off gleam of a star told him they were out in the open.

A voice came to his ears, low and clear. "The Master of the World bids you farewell, Nelson Lee!"

Not another word was spoken. But presently the Thing began to climb, holding Nelson Lee carelessly under one arm while it ran swiftly upwards and upwards. Soon the detective could see street lights twinkling far below, then the dark blur of surrounding roofs, and after that the vaster sea of lights from the great city.

And still he was borne upwards, ever higher. He did not wonder where he was going; that was hideously clear. He was being carried to the top of the great chimney the Master of the World had spoken about—and which he intended to destroy.

At last the nightmare journey stopped. Grunting and chuckling to itself, the Thing laid Nelson Lee face down across the edge of the chimney, so that his head and legs dangled into space. From where he lay the detective could see the millions of lights below, and presently they began to sway before his eyes in nauseating fashion. Yet when he tried to close them, his stiffened lids refused. He caught a glimpse of his bearer as it went over the side—a monstrous ape, all arms and black, bristling shoulders. Soon he was alone, balanced on the lip of the tallest chimney in London!

For a time nothing happened. And then, out of the blackness at the base of the stack, he saw something appear: another ray; an enormous, yellow glare.

As before, Lee could not tell whence it came; but he watched it moving steadily up the stack until it stopped half-way.

Dimly to his ears came the sudden imperative shrilling of police whistles, but his brain was past recording the fact. All he could do was watch that yellow disc, and as

he looked it deepened swiftly to a fiercely-brilliant orange.

Immediately, he saw the chimney brickwork begin to dissolve. Like steel cut by a blowpipe, the bricks crumbled, a gash appeared, widened, spread rapidly until it was a huge, gaping wound—and the chimney began to sway!

Steadily, that orange ray bit its way in, deeper and deeper. A dim sound of pandemonium below floated up, the chimney bent like a poplar in a breeze, swayed, rocked, tottered—

There was a terrible, rending sound; a hideous, grinding crash; and slowly, gradually at first, the huge stack commenced to fall. Lee felt the wind whistling in his ears, felt himself sliding forward helplessly. Then, as the enormous pile gathered momentum, he was flung, bound and paralysed, far into the air, like a stone from a catapult.

The lights of London grew brighter; seemed to spring upwards to meet him. A sound as of rushing waters roared in his brain; he dropped, dropped—Crash! came the thunder of the falling stack as it hurtled to disaster among the city roofs.

And in that awful moment, out of the night and the welter of noise, came the strangest help Nelson Lee had ever received. From the black sky above, a lithe figure swooped upon him, and a hand like a steel claw reached out and grasped his coat.

The buttons tore immediately, but before the detective had fallen another yard, muscular arms gripped him and held him safe. He found himself staring up into a stern, handsome face that gleamed whitely even in that dim light; he had a vision of two enormous curved wings beating smoothly; then his eyes were covered by an impatient hand, and at terrific speed, he felt himself carried across London.

The roaring sound in his brain grew louder, and ceased abruptly. Nelson Lee sagged forward unconscious in the strong arms of his mysterious rescuer!

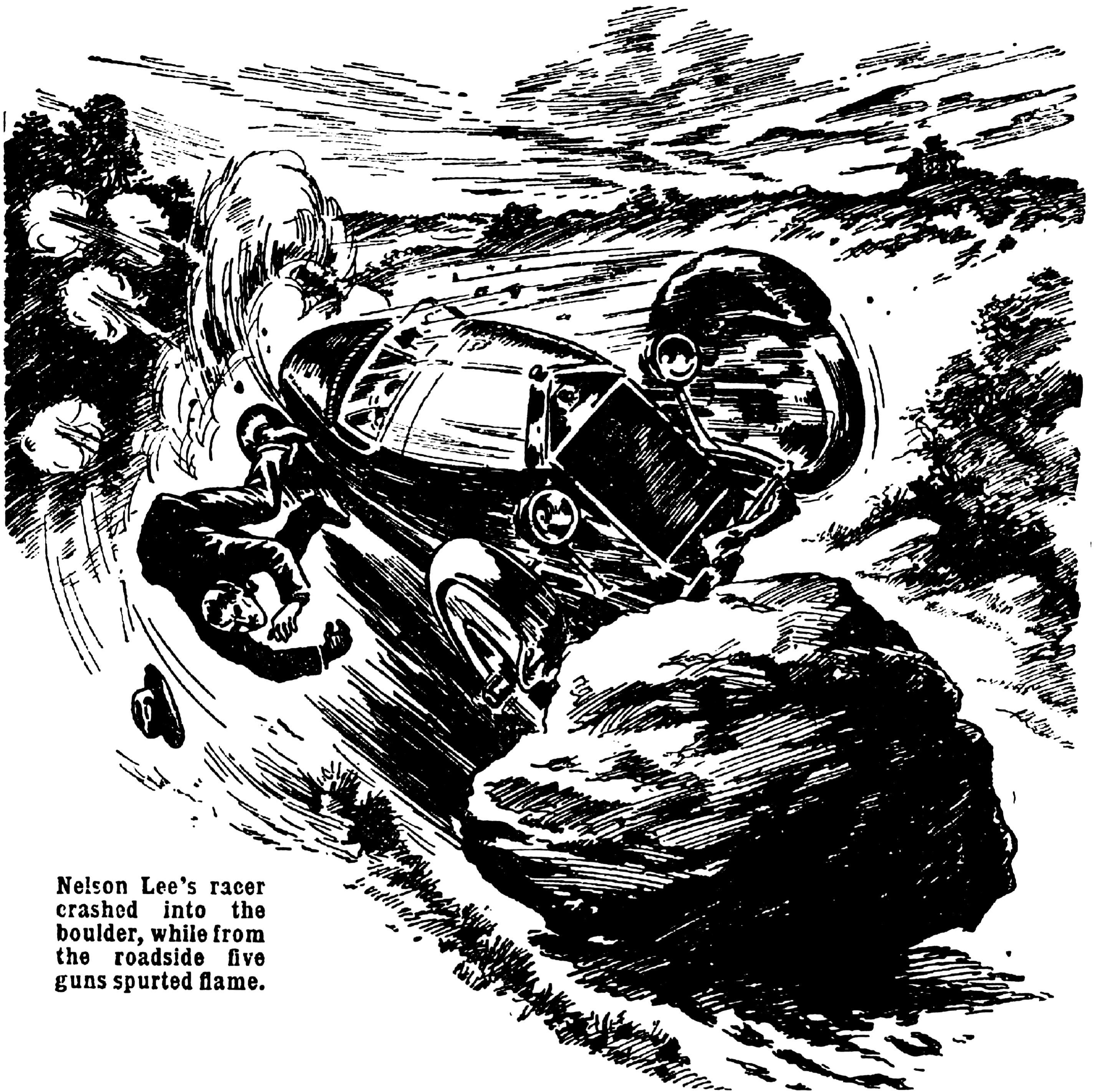
CHAPTER 4.

Nelson Lee's Dilemma!

"GUV'NOR! Guv'nor! Wake up!" Nelson Lee sighed drowsily. He seemed to be floating deep down in a warm sea of dreams, and a hand was pulling him vigorously to the surface. A familiar voice, miles away, was calling him again and again, but his mind felt clogged and dull.

He opened his eyes at last, to find himself staring vaguely around his own bedroom, and then at a face bending over him. His forehead puckered in a puzzled frown as he recognised his young assistant, Nipper. The lad's face was white with worry and sleeplessness.

Suddenly, as though a dam had burst, memory flooded back to the detective. Recent events crowded on him: the Master



Nelson Lee's racer crashed into the boulder, while from the roadside five guns spurted flame.

of the World, the Ice and Fire rays—and those great, curved wings that had swooped down to save him as he fell and fell—

Lee shivered slightly and sat up.

"So he brought me home!" he muttered queerly.

Nipper burst out excitedly:

"What's happened, gov'nor? Are you O.K.?"

"Half a sec., young 'un!"

Very cautiously, Nelson Lee began to move his arms and legs, testing each muscle in turn. His face cleared. The effect of the Ice Ray had worn off, as the Master had said it would, and except that his head and body ached badly, he felt none the worse physically. But mentally he was in a whirl. Lying back on the pillow, he smiled shakily at Nipper.

"How did I get here, lad?"

Nipper's eyes blazed.

"Gov'nor, I'm blowed if I know. I got your wire that you were returning and waited up until I began to get worried. All at once, just after twelve, the 'phone rang.

I answered it, and a strange, deep voice said: 'You will find Nelson Lee on the roof,' and—bang!—down went the receiver.

"I was flabbergasted. I thought it was a leg-pull, but at last I did shin out of the skylight—and there you were, absolutely unconscious and stone-cold!"

"I managed to get you down; and that's all. You seemed O.K. otherwise, 'cept for the cold and the cut over your eye, so I thought I'd wait till this morning before sending for the doc."

Nelson Lee smiled approvingly.

"Good—glad you did. So he caught me and brought me home!" he murmured again absently.

Before Nipper could ask further questions the shrill bell of the bedside telephone cut in. Nelson Lee reached for it quickly.

"That you, Lee?" It was Chief Detective-inspector Lennard's voice, urgent and wrathful. "Great Scott, this is the third time this morning I've 'phoned you!"

The inspector sounded so flurried that Lee

immediately shelved his other problem for the moment, and answered soothingly:

"Sorry, old chap! What's doing?"

He whistled softly at Lennard's reply and nodded.

"I'll be round in half an hour," he said, and slipped briskly out of bed.

"The Chief Commissioner himself wants me, Nipper. Hustle!"

Nipper hustled. A conference with the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard meant something decidedly big.

Nelson Lee was as good as his word. Thirty minutes later, he and Nipper were shown into Sir Hugh Fletcher's office at the Yard; and a brief glance round was sufficient to tell him that something vital was in the air.

Surrounding the Chief Commissioner were the heads of all the Yard departments, and their faces were very grave. Lee noticed, too, that their eyes flew at once to the piece of adhesive tape on his wounded forehead.

Sir Hugh offered him his hand and a wintry smile.

"Morning, Lee. You've been hurt, I see," he said quickly.

"A little motor spill!" explained Nelson Lee smoothly, wondering why the Commissioner looked curiously disappointed. "Well, Sir Hugh?"

It did not need his keen eyes to see the Chief Commissioner was a very worried man; that was only too plain. Without delay Sir Hugh snatched a letter from his desk and passed it over.

"This came yesterday morning. Read it, Lee!" he commanded harshly.

Taking a chair, Nelson Lee sat down quietly and opened the letter. His first glance was for the signature; and though not a single muscle of his face moved, his heart began to beat more quickly. For the letter was from the man who styled himself Master of the World. Its arrogant wording brought a slight smile to his lips:

"To the Chief Commissioner,
Scotland Yard.

"Sir,—To demonstrate the effect of my new Fire Ray, I shall destroy the chimney-stack of the Thameside Ironworks to-night on the stroke of twelve.

"The body of Nelson Lee, private detective, will be found among the ruins. You will hear from me again.

"THE MASTER OF THE WORLD."

Nelson Lee examined the letter carefully, then handed it back—without a word. Down came Sir Hugh's bushy eyebrows, and he tugged savagely at his moustache.

"I suppose you think it's a joke, Lee?" he snapped.

"I haven't said so!" smiled Nelson Lee blandly.

The Chief Commissioner thumped his desk loudly.

"But you think it, though. Well, I can't

blame you; we all did except Lennard, who thought we ought to get in touch with you—in case. And now——" He paused for a long moment. "That chimney came down at twelve o'clock last night!"

Nipper gasped. But Lee still smiled.

"Yet I'm here all right!" he murmured.

"Yes," agreed the Commissioner vigorously. "But the fact remains—the chimney came down, smashed up four houses, injured a dozen people and utterly buried the factory beneath."

"Ah! Anyone found in the factory?" asked Lee swiftly.

"Why," put in Lennard jerkily, "should there be?"

"I'm asking you!"

"Well, no, as a matter of fact—only in the private houses. We've had men digging in the ruins since early morning."

"I see." Lee's thoughts were busy. He had hoped that perhaps one of the Master's men might have been trapped in the disaster. Apparently all had got clear. "Anything else, Sir Hugh?"

"Yes!" cried Sir Hugh forcibly. "At three minutes to twelve the constable on beat happened to look up and saw a yellow light shining on the chimney-stack, about half-way up. And even as he looked, he swears the brickwork began to split right open. We've questioned him, but that's all he saw: just the ring of yellow light and nothing more. The next he knows is that the chimney snapped clean in two and collapsed!"

Amid silence he picked up a second letter and passed it to Nelson Lee.

"We received this—this morning," he added quietly.

Still with the same unmoved features, Nelson Lee read the note. The words were as curt and as disdainful as before:

"You have seen my power. What I did last night I can do to every building in the world.

"I require two million pounds from the British Government. Other countries will be dealt with later.

"Unless this sum is handed over at 11 a.m. on Saturday to my messenger (harm him at your peril!), I shall destroy the Bank of England and collect therefrom the sum of THREE million pounds.

"This is my first demand. I shall telephone for your answer to-day.

"THE MASTER OF THE WORLD."

"H'm!" mused Lee, tapping the astounding document thoughtfully. "Both letters typed on ordinary paper with a standard machine. Nothing there! Any finger-prints, Sir Hugh?"

"Yes," nodded the Commissioner. "This was found in the top left-hand corner of each letter!"

He handed over a card containing two developed thumb-prints, and Nelson Lee's

eyes narrowed, for right across the ball of each thumb ran the line of a deep scar!

"Ah! Made by the typist straightening the paper in the machine!" he commented. "Are they known?"

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"We've no record!" he said.

Leaning carelessly back in his chair, Nelson Lee lit a cigarette.

"And what steps are you taking against—this?" he asked, blowing a thin cloud of smoke ceilingwards. "I take it his Majesty's Government aren't paying the two millions?"

A general smile ran round the room as the Chief Commissioner jumped to his feet.

"No, Lee, they're not!" he snorted emphatically. "I have been in communication with the Home Secretary and have to see him later. In the meantime, we shall treat this letter as a serious threat—after last night; and, of course, we shall move Heaven and earth to find who is behind it all. But"—and his fist thumped the desk—"whether this—this madman smashes the Bank as he did the Thames-side chimney last night or not, let him try to get away with the money. There are always soldiers on duty inside the Bank of England, and in addition, by gad, I'll surround it with constables four deep! The—the impudent hound!" he blazed, sitting down heavily.

Nelson Lee continued to smoke. And now the Commissioner leaned forward and stared at him closely.

"Lee," he said slowly, "your name is mentioned in that first letter in a very—well, queer way. Why should they want to kill you? Do you know—anything?"

It was the question Nelson Lee had been dreading, although he had seen it coming for a long time. He was in the biggest quandary of his life.

Only too well did he know that if Scotland Yard surrounded the Bank of England with every man available, still the Master of the World would triumph.

The Ice Ray—the finest troops in the world would be helpless against that, even as he himself had been helpless last night. And the Master had not mentioned the Ice Ray in his letters. He was keeping that trump card up his sleeve. Scotland Yard knew nothing about that!

Yet Nelson Lee was unable to tell what he himself knew. For if he did, and gave Sir Hugh chapter and verse of his uncanny experience, questions as to his amazing rescue in mid-air would follow inevitably.

And, for certain reasons of his own, Nelson Lee had no intention of discussing that rescue with anyone—yet!

So he smoked and thought. The Yard officials stared at him curiously, and a frown of astonishment appeared on the Chief Commissioner's face. It was an awkward moment; and Nelson Lee heaved a faint sigh of relief as the telephone on Sir Hugh's desk sprang suddenly to life. Still frowning, the Commissioner took the receiver off slowly.

Everyone watched him. And when, a moment later, he turned to them with his florid face grey with anger, every man there knew who was at the other end of the line.

"Gentlemen," gasped Sir Hugh, "this—this is the Master of the World—calling for his answer!"

IN one swift stride, Nelson Lee crossed to the desk, and took the 'phone gently from the Commissioner's hand. His face was smiling.

"Hallo, your Majesty!" he called sweetly.

He was rewarded instantly by a little gasp over the wire, then, after a pause, the voice he had heard at midnight answered him:

"Who are you? You are not Sir Hugh Fletcher!"

"Correct. I am Nelson Lee!" smiled the detective. "I thought you might like to know I am 'not among the ruins,' your Majesty! And"—he added sternly—"the British Government refuses your demand!"

"In that case, the British Government will suffer!" came the Master's voice venomously. "And you, too, Nelson Lee!"

Click! The 'phone was silent.

Replacing the receiver, Nelson Lee turned to find himself the target of fixed and startled eyes. Sir Hugh was the first to break the spell.

"Why—what—what the dickens, Lee!"

"My answer was correct, I believe, Sir Hugh?" asked Lee calmly.

"Yes. But—but, by Jupiter, Lee! What's it mean? What d'you know?"

Nelson Lee took up his hat and gloves.

"This much, Sir Hugh!" he replied steadily. "That you will be risking many lives by surrounding the Bank of England on Saturday. Because the Bank will be destroyed. I can't tell you more—but that is my warning!"

"Where are you going, Lee?" cried Lennard hastily.

"To the one man I know who can possibly help us!" cried Nelson Lee. "Thurston Kyle!"

Sir Hugh raised his head sharply.

"Thurston Kyle? The famous scientist?" he asked wonderingly.

A quizzical smile lit Nelson Lee's eyes.

"Yes. Thurston Kyle—the scientist!" he said quietly.

CHAPTER 5.

The Invisible Peril!

OUTSIDE the Yard, Nelson Lee paused with one foot on his car—for he ran another besides the now wrecked Rolls—and put a card into Nipper's hand.

"Young 'un, I want you to go straight back to headquarters—and stop there! I'm going to the address I've written on that card. If you don't hear from me in two hours, get hold of Lennard and come right along!"

The lad nodded.

"Right, gov'nor!" And snapped his fingers at a passing taxi.

Leaving him, Nelson Lee headed his car northwards through London, through old Highgate and Hampstead, across the famous Heath; nor did he stop until, in a quiet backwater beyond the Spaniards, he pulled up at last before the tall iron gates of an old mansion, standing in its own private lane.

The house itself he could not see, for it was entirely cut off from the world, first by a high blank wall, and again by a dense screen of tall trees and tangled shrubberies. He tried the heavy gates and found them locked, but he had expected no less, and, backing his car against the wall, he climbed over and dropped neatly down the other side into the grounds.

A winding gravel path led away through the trees, and Lee sauntered along quietly until he came in sight of the house, a rambling Georgian mansion, separated from the trees by a wide, sunlit lawn. On the edge of the lawn he stepped swiftly into the shade of a dark copper beech, and looked about him long and carefully.

As far as he could see, the place was utterly deserted; only the whispering trees disturbed the eerie stillness. Running his eye over the house, the detective noticed, high up in one corner, a pair of wide French windows twinkling in the sun, and in front of them, a small, low veranda. Somehow they looked oddly out of place up there, so near the roof, and he studied them for some minutes; then with a pensive nod, he began to cross the lawn.

Two steps he took from the shelter of the tree, and what he saw next stopped him like a bullet. Lee stood motionless; only his hand crept stealthily towards his hip, and his eyes were hard and alert.

On the sunlit grass before him, a dark blur had suddenly appeared; a shadow; and while he stared, its outlines grew more distinct. It was the shadow of a great hawk, wings outstretched, hovering directly above him.

Crouching, the detective threw back his head, searching the blue sky. And saw nothing. Yet the shadow of the wings covered him ominously.

A laugh rang out from the sky, savago and triumphant, and, looking up, Lee was just in time to see a great glistening bird whistling down upon him like a shooting star.

There was no time to dodge, to do anything. As a straw is caught up by the wind, the detective was swept off his feet and whirled high into the air. He heard a mocking voice telling him not to struggle, and for the second time in twelve hours he was carried helplessly through space.

The huge house loomed up before him as he was taken straight and true to the little veranda and the French windows. There the wild flight checked miraculously. He was thrown forward. He landed on the balcony, lost his balance and plunged against

the windows, half-turning as he did so to look behind.

Three yards from the veranda, suspended in mid-air by a pair of curving, gently-fluttering wings, was the man who had rescued him last night, clad now from head to toe in a shimmering, skin-tight costume. His lean face was fierce and pitiless, and a squat automatic held at his hip covered the detective squarely.

"Get inside, Nelson Lee!" he whispered freezingly.

With the ghost of a smile on his firm lips, Nelson Lee pushed open the windows and went inside.

HE found himself in a vast, tiled room, half library, half laboratory. A single glance was sufficient to tell him that the place was magnificently equipped; the workshop of a genius engaged in research far beyond ordinary understanding.

For a layman, Nelson Lee himself was no mean scientist; yet never before had he seen such an amazing array of strange apparatus, dials, wires and switchboards. Shelves of bottles and phials lined the wall above a bench containing huge retorts and strange instruments, and a dynamo in a far corner filled the room with a faint, monotonous purr.

Near the window stood a cabinet containing a curiously-designed radio set, and seated before this, with sensitive receivers clamped about his head, sat a freckled lad of about Nipper's weight and style. The boy surveyed him calmly for a moment as he came in, then turned away to manipulate a dial with a long, sensitive hand.

A light step at his back made Nelson Lee wheel slowly round. He had recovered his poise quickly, and faced his strange captor with a smile.

"Good-morning, Thurston Kyle!" he said calmly.

The other's piercing eyes never wavered. He was a magnificently-built man, slightly taller than Nelson Lee, and with his great, sweeping wings just touching the floor behind him, he made an imposing figure standing against the windows. Still covering Lee with the automatic, he inclined his head towards an armchair placed beside a great bureau.

"Be seated, please!"

The fierceness had died out of his face, leaving it coldly handsome; his voice was deep and commanding.

With a little bow the detective sauntered to the chair and sat down, and as he did so Thurston Kyle came to the bureau and deliberately pressed a small button. Instantly two steel arms closed tightly round Nelson Lee's body; at the same moment he felt his legs imprisoned in the same way. Looking down, he saw a tangle of electric wires at the foot of the chair.

He was completely trapped. Yet his smile broadened as he looked up casually.

"Very neat!" he murmured approvingly. Thurston Kyle turned away without

word. The freckled youngster had left his work and was busy unbuckling the shining wings from his master's back.

Nelson Lee watched intently. He saw that the wings were exquisitely made of some light metal, and that each was an exact copy of a hawk's pinion, feather for feather.

They were harnessed to the flyer's body by hinged controls and leather straps. But it was the material with which they were covered that fascinated the detective.

The reason he had not seen Thurston Kyle hovering above him outside was plain now. Each wing and his own flying-suit were covered with a species of silk treated with some unknown chemical to absorb the light and take on the colour of the immediate background. Against the sky, such material would melt into invisibility fifty yards above ground. It was the last word in camouflage; only the gliding shadow of his wings on the ground could betray the flyer's presence.

Patiently Nelson Lee settled himself in the trap-chair and waited. Thurston Kyle's wings were off at last, and, slipping a gorgeous Chinese smock over his silk flying-suit, he sank into another armchair and sat studying his prisoner beneath forbidding brows.

His first words gave Lee a surprise.

"I expected you to-day, Nelson Lee!" he said coldly. "It is fortunate you elected to come here alone; otherwise, my friend, you would not have come over my outer wall alive!"

Nelson Lee only smiled and held his tongue. He had known all along he would be running a great risk, but he had come to see this strange man on a vital errand. It was not time to speak yet!

Thurston Kyle's eyes stabbed like daggers.

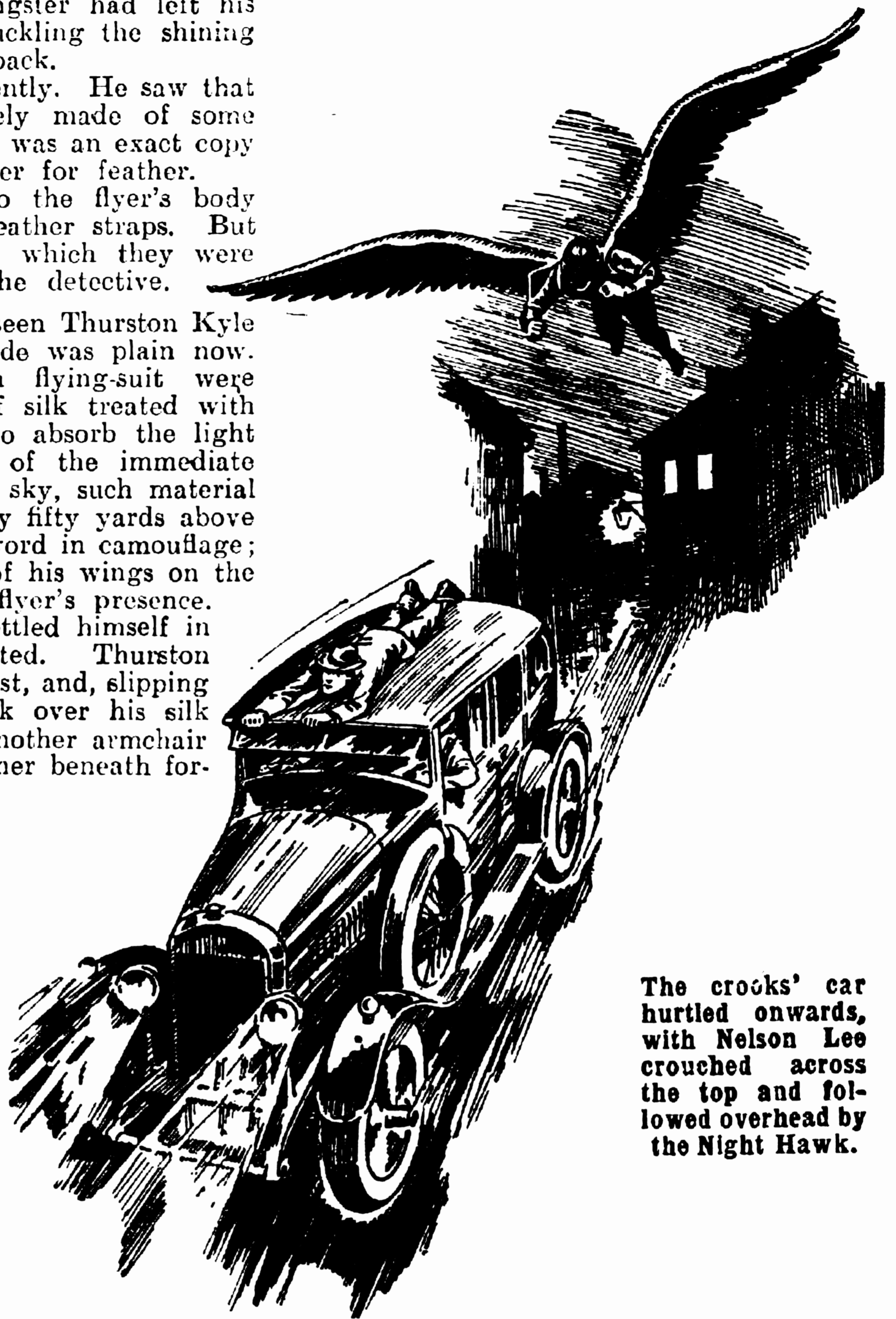
"I presume you recognised me last night!" he went on. "I confess, when I discovered your name from the cards in your pocket, I was tempted to let you drop! I have heard of your reputation, Nelson Lee!" He leant forward menacingly. "And I do not want you prying into the affairs of the Night Hawk!"

His meaning was very obvious. Nelson Lee raised his eyebrows.

"I found out the identity of the Night Hawk some time ago," he said placidly, "and have told no one. I, too, had dealings with Silas Benton!"

A startled gleam in the stern eyes opposite, and a quickly-smothered gasp from the young assistant showed that his thrust had gone home. Thurston Kyle's hands clenched.

"You found out? When?"



The crooks' car hurtled onwards, with Nelson Lee crouched across the top and followed overhead by the Night Hawk.

"The night you finally smashed Benton's headquarters! Your features showed up plainly in the glare of the fire!"

"Ah! You were there? Where?"

"Safe among the sand-dunes beyond the house—fortunately!" replied Lee, leaning back with a frank smile. "I know it was you who saved the North-Eastern express and the Lanchester Hunt Ball robberies. I can guess a lot more!"

Leaping to his feet, the Night Hawk towered above him, seeming to read his inmost thoughts.

"And you have kept this secret to yourself?"

Nelson Lee shrugged.

"Obviously!" he said curtly. "The police wanted to know, of course, for even such men as Benton's gangsters cannot be killed as you killed them! Yet——"

"I have my own methods of dealing with criminals, Nelson Lee!" blazed the Night Hawk harshly.

"Just so!" answered Lee. "And why should I betray you? The Benton gang was a menace that neither Scotland Yard nor myself could conquer. But it was plain that some terrible unknown ally was wiping them out steadily. I discovered accidentally that you were that ally, and"—he shrugged again—"I kept the discovery secret." He raised his head with sudden dignity and gave Thurston Kyle look for look. "On my word of honour!" he added.

For a long minute the Night Hawk's eyes continued to bore into him. Then he leaned across the bureau and pressed the button again. The steel arms round Nelson Lee's body shot back into their sockets once more.

"Thank you, Lee!" said Thurston Kyle gravely. "I apologise!"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet, hand outstretched.

"And I want to thank you for—last night!" he answered simply. "Also, I have come to you for help against a criminal far worse than Silas Benton!"

A slight smile twitched the Night Hawk's lips as, from a wonderful Eastern cabinet, he produced a lacquered cigar-box.

"I know you have," he replied. "You wish to know about the Master of the World!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Message of Doom!

"**W**HA-AT!"

It was Nelson Lee's turn now to be startled. Sheer astonishment at the words brought him half out of his chair to stare at his baffling host as though unable to believe his own ears.

The man was uncanny. The very atmosphere of the place seemed charged with some mesmeric influence issuing from the cold, dominating figure who sat in barbaric splendour against a background of modern science.

"Why—how did you know that?" he asked sharply. "I only made up my mind to come—"

"While you were at Scotland Yard!" smiled Thurston Kyle. "I listened to your conference with Sir Hugh Fletcher. Hence your somewhat rough reception when you arrived here!"

"You—listened!" repeated Nelson Lee in amazement. "How?"

The Night Hawk raised a strong white hand, and the freckled lad came forward with a grin.

"This is my assistant, Snub Hawkins, Lee! Snub, show Mr. Lee our secret service!"

Following the boy's beckoning finger, Nelson Lee rose and went over to the radio cabinet. He was given a pair of earphones, and watched in silence while Snub's hands moved swiftly over a series of dials and a tiny switchboard until, suddenly, a voice

booming in his ear gave him another shock of surprise.

For the voice was that of Sir Hugh Fletcher, and he was talking to Chief Detective-inspector Lennard—about the Master of the World!

Nelson Lee listened hard. Strong and clear, the Chief Commissioner's words came:

"See to it immediately, Lennard. A picked detachment from every division for special duty at the Bank on Saturday night! Line the surrounding roads with men, too, and see that every main road out of town is motor-patrolled. By gad, I'll—"

The famous detective had heard enough—Sir Hugh meant to go through with his useless precautions. Replacing the earphones soberly, he turned to see the Night Hawk watching him through narrowed eyes.

"Well, Lee? Interesting, is it not?"

"Very!" replied Nelson Lee quietly. "A marvellous invention!" He did not ask questions, rightly guessing that they would not be welcomed. Instead, he walked across to his chair and took up his cigar.

A hand pressed his shoulder lightly.

"And now, my friend, suppose you tell me who this Master of the World is! For I know nothing beyond what I overheard this morning."

Nelson Lee looked up in quick disappointment.

"Ah! I hoped, as you were close at hand last night, that you knew something about the attack on the chimney."

Thurston Kyle shook his head.

"It was the purest luck that I was there to catch you, Lee. I was cruising above the docks when I saw a yellow light appear on the Thames-side foundry-stack. I was only faintly interested until I saw what was happening, and then, as the chimney fell, I saw you shoot from the top, helpless. So"—he waved his hand—"I swooped and caught you. That is all."

"Then why did you listen to our conference at the Yard this morning?" asked Lee quickly.

"There are certain people and places I keep under observation every day!" smiled the Night Hawk coldly. "Scotland Yard is one."

His narrowed eyes searched Nelson Lee again.

"You told Sir Hugh nothing of your narrow escape from death last night!" he cried. "Why? It was obvious to me that you were hiding something."

"Should I have told Scotland Yard that the Night Hawk rescued me?" asked Lee, looking at him squarely. "That was the reason I held my tongue. And now I'll tell you the full story—and why I have come to you."

Briefly, but in full detail, he told Thurston Kyle everything that had occurred since his car first hit the boulder on the Exmoor road. Chin in hand, eyes veiled by half-closed lids, the Night Hawk listened attentively, and when the detective finished at last there was

a stillness within the great laboratory for some seconds afterwards.

The youngster, Snub Hawkins, was flushed with excitement, but his master had relapsed into a deep reverie.

"Fire and Ice rays!" he murmured. "I have long suspected their existence; yet the man who has harnessed them to his own ends, as you describe, Lee, must be a genius. I should like to cross swords with him!" he concluded grimly.

"All I know about him is this," continued Nelson Lee. "He is a scientific genius, as you say; he is violently mad, but has a companion who can control his fits; he keeps a tame ape or gorilla, and either he himself or his secretary has a scarred thumb!"

Thurston Kyle nodded, still deep in thought.

"I can find him—eventually!" he muttered. "There are few scientists clever enough to capture light rays in that manner!" He sat up impressively. "And now—what do you want of me, Nelson Lee?"

"Your help!" flashed Lee. "You are the one man I know who can save the world. Your secret would have been safe with me, and still is; but now you are needed. Both as Thurston Kyle, scientist, and Thurston Kyle—the Night Hawk!"

Lee began to pace the laboratory with long strides.

"A madman is threatening us—with weapons more terrible than explosive or poison gas. Sir Hugh Fletcher will surround the Bank with police and soldiers; the Master will mow them down like corn. And if we take cover, he can smash our buildings into powder! That I know. But you—high in the air—may be safe; free to fight him by your own methods. And you are a world-famous scientist yourself!"

For the third time that morning, the telephone interrupted Lee imperiously. Snub snatched it up, and his eyes widened as he listened. He turned quickly to the detective.

"You—you're wanted, sir."

Lee had the 'phone to his ear in a flash.

"Nelson Lee speaking. Who is it?"

It was Nipper; Nipper, whose voice seemed choked and trembling with a ghastly fear. Lee's pulse raced; he had never heard such a note in his plucky assistant's voice before.

"Guv'nor, is that you? This room; it's full of green light—it's got me! I'm freez—"

His words broke off. Lee heard the 'phone drop, followed by a heavy thud and the crash of a chair. Then silence!

WHITE to the lips, Nelson Lee turned to Thurston Kyle, telling him what had happened. The Night Hawk's muscular body stiffened and his eyes glittered. He tore off his robe with a single jerk.

"My wings, Snub! Lee, your house has

a skylight? Good! The boy shall be here in ten minutes!"

In five, he was ready for flight, so fast did Snub Hawkins work. From the balcony, Nelson Lee watched him poise himself for a moment then, with a strong beat of the wings, go flashing across the lawn. Before he had reached the trees, he had vanished from view as though through a curtain.

"Marvellous!" breathed Lee, and pulled out his watch. He stood waiting in anxious silence with Snub at his side. On the stroke of the tenth minute, Thurston Kyle dropped out of the sky again—with Nipper slung across his back, stiff and unconscious!

Without a word, the Night Hawk strode into the laboratory and laid the boy on a table. He shed his wings at once and crossed to his chemistry bench, where Nelson Lee heard the busy clink of bottles, and presently a pungent odour crept into the air. Long minutes followed; but when Thurston Kyle returned to Nipper's side he held a hypodermic syringe in one hand and a small phial in the other.

Pulling the lad's sleeve back, he sterilised his arm carefully and plunged the needle under the skin. After that, he stood back and stared at Nelson Lee.

"The Master of the World is not the only scientist!" he said dryly. "We shall see!"

Fifteen minutes later Nelson Lee's face wore the look of a man who has seen a miracle performed. Nipper still lay on the table; but movement had returned to his limbs and he was trying confusedly to say something. Very gently Thurston Kyle soothed him to silence.

"He will do now!" he nodded. "That is the most powerful stimulant known to science." He held out his hand. "Lee, I will help you smash this peril!" he added fiercely. "What are your plans?"

"None—yet!" answered Nelson Lee steadily. "But when the attack on the Bank of England is made to-morrow night, I shall be there—with this!" His hand closed over the small phial and the syringe. "Whatever happens, someone must come to fetch the three million pounds away—as Sir Hugh says. And if your drug will protect me from the Ice Ray, I'll follow that 'someone' till I drop!"

The Night Hawk's eyes flashed.

"So be it. You are a brave man, Lee. I shall be there, too!"

"Thank you!" said Nelson Lee. "And until I can follow those clues, and attack, I shall be content to defend!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Master Attacks!

FROM the steps of the Royal Exchange, Nelson Lee, face hidden by a wide-peaked cap, stood staring across to where the imposing bulk of the Bank of England raised its giant columns to the

darkness above. It was Saturday night, 11.30. In exactly half an hour the threatened attack by the Master of the World would commence.

In his efforts to guard the Bank, Sir Hugh Fletcher, the Chief Commissioner of Police, had certainly planned with a splendid thoroughness. Everywhere Nelson Lee looked he saw file upon file of stalwart policemen. Since early evening picked men from every Metropolitan and City division had arrived and taken up positions within the great square formed by the Bank itself, the Exchange and the Mansion House. The roads leading out of the square were lined on either side, and the body of Guards who are always on duty at nights inside the Bank had been paraded outside.

Every man stood at a certain distance from the Bank in case of falling masonry. For Sir Hugh, Nelson Lee, and everyone there knew that the front at least of the Bank was doomed.

Outside the cordon a police network of motor-patrols stretched from London to the coast; every possible defence had been thrown up in case the Master of the World succeeded in breaking through and out again with his spoils.

To prevent anything like a public panic, nothing had been allowed to leak into the papers. The traffic throughout the City had been temporarily diverted, and as the neighbourhood of the Bank late on Saturday nights resembles a wilderness of echoing streets and empty business houses, Sir Hugh's task had been easier than it looked.

The great body of London's citizens went about their Saturday pleasures blissfully unaware that, in the heart of the City, men with tingling nerves and grim faces were waiting to encounter the attack of a scientific maniac.

Nelson Lee glanced at his watch again. Fifteen minutes.

The detective's eyes were hard and watchful. Since his interview with Thurston Kyle yesterday, he had scarcely rested a minute in his attempt to uncover some trail leading to the Master of the World; and at every turn he had failed. The time had been too short and the clues too slender.

Sir Hugh himself came bustling up, masking his feelings by a forced cheeriness.

"Well, Lee; everything's ready, what? He'll have his work cut out to get that three million, eh?"

Nelson Lee did not answer. He knew that, as far as Sir Hugh and the police were concerned, the battle was as good as over. The Commissioner went hastily to his post in the centre of the square for a last-



Clasped helplessly in the embrace of a huge ape, Nelson Lee was carried out of the room—to his death!

minute conference with his lieutenants, and presently Nelson Lee moved out of the shadow of the Exchange into the glare of a street lamp.

Nobody was watching him. He glanced upwards. A single stab of light from the dark sky above the Bank showed for a split second, and he touched the peak of his cap in answer.

In his pocket, wrapped in cotton wool, lay Thurston Kyle's syringe, charged with the powerful drug that had revived Nipper. That, and the presence of the Night Hawk cruising unseen through the darkness overhead, were the only defences likely to prove of any use to-night—when the Twin Rays of Destruction appeared.

Ten minutes!

Nelson Lee's own plans were still vague. If all went well, he should be the only one capable of acting after the Ice Ray had done its work. What happened then would depend on circumstances. Even with the aid of the Night Hawk it might be impossible to ward off the impending attack; but he must and would follow the retreat of the attackers, and so try to discover their headquarters.

The detective had a strange and ruthless ally overhead, and Nipper and Snub Hawkins were safe in the mysterious house on Hampstead Heath, ready to act if called upon.

A tense air of expectancy had descended on the little army of police and soldiers standing alert, shoulder to shoulder, in the silent midnight streets. Only the faint roar of London traffic outside the cordon floated softly over the high, dark buildings.

Nelson Lee's eyes were on his watch, and he drew a long, deep breath.

Five minutes—three—two—one!

A thundering shout of rage and the crackle of startled commands made him look up. The eastern side of the square was bathed in a brilliant green light.

The Master of the World was attacking!

darkness, swamping the square in a matter of seconds, and lapping over and beyond into the side streets as a tidal wave smothers a beach.

Its size and the ghastly brilliance was overwhelming, even to Nelson Lee. Instead of the small pool of light he had seen before, he saw a vast, dazzling glare, drowning tall buildings, street lamps, everything. A babel of choking cries swelled to a confused roar; boots clattered frantically on stone pavements. An inferno had broken out. Through the eye-piercing blaze Lee saw policemen collapsing right and left, not in ones or twos, but in masses, falling quiet and rigid as though a great invisible hand was brushing them out.

Like lightning the detective pulled back his sleeve and thrust the syringe into his arm, emptying Thurston Kyle's drug into his body. He was barely in time; the Ice Ray reached him a second later.

Something struck the core of his brain like a hammer. Beneath the two influences fighting in his nerve-centres, he staggered blindly, like a drunken man, and pitched into the gutter across a burly sergeant of police. Through dimming eyes he watched the Ice Ray flood the centre of the square, saw Sir Hugh waving his arms in a gallant attempt to rally his men until he, too, crumpled into a grotesque heap.

Steadily, horribly, the Ice Ray passed over, its course marked by the thud of falling men. Loud shouts and orders still came from the direction of Cheapside, but they died away also as the ray withered the shouters. It was as though the world had come to

an end; a spectacle that was terribly uncanny; the sight of Science let loose to prey on helpless men.

Prone in the gutter, Nelson Lee struggled to keep his head. A weird battle was raging in his body. His heart was racing madly and his limbs twitched as though an ague gripped him. He watched the Ice Ray drain



CHAPTER 8.

Twin Rays of Destruction!

EVENTS moved then with an appalling swiftness! There was nothing about this of the slow-climbing torture administered to Nelson Lee. Like a livid fog, the Ice Ray poured out of the

away from the square and flow down the side streets, and then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the green light vanished from sight.

Dimly he became aware once more of the street lights shining placidly on the silent disaster below, and as he looked up something seemed to snap inside his head. Warmth and feeling surged through his body once more, dispelling the awful cold numbness that had gripped him. He raised himself on hands and knees and stared around.

The Night Hawk's drug had triumphed over the Ice Ray. Nelson Lee, at least, of all that hushed company in the square could move.

He glanced at the time again. The first attack had taken five minutes; five minutes in which to shatter completely a great body of resolute, finely-disciplined men, and cover the heart of London City with frozen, unconscious figures.

Scarcely daring to breathe, he bent and tore open the tunic of the sergeant beside him, feeling for the man's pulse. His own leapt with thankfulness. At least the Master of the World had been merciful in one respect; he had wiped the police out of action, but he had not killed them!

An appalling stillness descended on the quiet square. Where five minutes before, men had been upright and ready, now they lay in little curious mounds. Nelson Lee glanced skywards. The Night Hawk was watching him closely, for at once came the swift gleam of light.

And now Nelson Lee heard the hum of swiftly approaching motor-cars. The noise increased steadily until, one by one, five covered cars converged into the square and stopped within a few yards of where he lay. They did not all come out of the same side road, but each had arrived at the battle-ground by different routes. The Master's organisation was perfect; doubtless his Ice Ray had spread disaster over a wide area.

Each car held two men beside the driver. But when they pulled up only one got out from the leading car and ran rapidly to the middle of the square. A mask covered the top half of his face, and because of that Nelson Lee instantly recognised him as Karl, the man who had led the masked ambushers on Exmoor.

A wave of disappointment made him grit his teeth. If Karl, an underling, was in charge, it must mean that the Master of the World was not leading the attack in person! It was a bitter blow.

The man's confidence was superb. He did not waste a single glance at the fallen men around him, knowing his Master had dealt with them. In his hand he held a small, box-like instrument that presently emitted tiny sparks and a waspish buzz.

Nelson Lee glued his eyes to it. He could see Karl's right hand quivering rapidly as the sparks glittered, and at once guessed he was working some sort of portable telegraph, operating in Morse.

But why? And where was the Fire Ray? Both questions were answered next instant, for on the front of the Mansion House a great circle of yellow light appeared.

His brain working at top-speed, Nelson Lee's eyes flashed back to Karl. A fresh cluster of sparks twinkled from the instrument he held, and at once the Fire Ray twitched towards the Bank, lighting up one side of it. Another burst of sparks, and this time the Ray crawled along until it settled squarely over the front of the great building!

The detective's eyes gleamed. A wild hope thrilled him. He guessed what was happening and smiled in fierce delight; for he knew he had made a huge discovery already!

Evidently the Masters' attack held one great weakness. He could not control the Fire Ray accurately, and so he had to send a range-finder on ahead, armed with a wireless telegraph! That was something gained, even if Lee had not the faintest idea how far or from which direction the Ray was coming.

A further sparkle from Karl's instrument confirmed his theory, for immediately the yellow ray turned to a ring of brilliant orange fire—just as it had done at the Thameside Ironworks.

And just as the Thameside chimney had begun to crumble, so Nelson Lee saw the enormous doors of the Bank of England dissolve. In a moment a great hole had appeared, increasing swiftly, larger and larger, until, with a rending smash, a huge portion of the building fell inwards.

The crash of falling bricks and timber filled the square, and more thunder followed as the ray ate its way into the very heart of the building, burning as it went. Stonework crumbled, steel girders showed through like the grim bones of a skeleton. Then they, too, snapped.

In a few seconds all was over. The Bank of England, with its guards lying stiff and still outside and a gaping wound driven right into its vaults, lay open and defenceless!

NELSON LEE glanced furtively at his watch again. The second attack had taken three minutes—eight minutes in all!

Karl and his men went swiftly to work. Like bees at a hive, they swarmed into the Bank and out again, darting to and from the vaults to the cars, staggering under heavy bullion boxes, officially marked.

For twenty minutes they worked feverishly. Nelson Lee wondered why no aid came from outside the City until suddenly he caught a flash of the Ice Ray over the tops of the buildings. That was keeping any rescuers at bay!

Looking up, he became aware that the Night Hawk was signalling from the sky. He raised his head cautiously and watched the men. One and all were intent upon their looting, and he waved his hand quickly.

Instantly, in answer, came a rapid dot, dash from his winged ally; a message that made Nelson Lee smile recklessly.

The raid was nearing its end; all but the last car, a few yards away from him, had been loaded, and the men were piling into their seats. He began to crawl forward, silent as an Indian scout.

Karl ran to the top of the column, the telegraph in his hand.

"Ready!" he called; and a deep growl answered him.

Sparks flew rapidly from the instrument, motor engines purred, and he hurried to his place in the leading car.

Amid a soft change of gears and the long-drawn whine of speeding engines, the raiding fleet, with three million pounds in gold between them, began to steal away from the still, littered square.

Flat in the road, Nelson Lee watched them go. The first one turned its nose up Cornhill, and, in a string, the others wheeled and followed. When the last got under way, he chuckled fiercely. Now was his time to step in!

Patting the gun in his pocket, he rose in the darkness to his full height, arms extended above his head. He heard a faint whisper of gliding wings, felt the Night Hawk sweep down and lift him smoothly into the air, and a second later he was laid gently and neatly on the saloon top of the last car, just as it slid forward at full speed.

"I'm following!" he heard the Night Hawk whisper, and, sprawling full length, he hooked his fingers over one edge of the car and braced his feet over the other.

And so commenced a wild race eastwards through London in the small hours, the bandits' cars hurtling into the night, Nelson Lee hanging on to the last for grim death, and, above them all, on black driving wings, Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk.

Where would the journey end?

CHAPTER 9.

The Winged Avenger!

THROUGH Cornhill, Leadenhall Street, into Aldgate and Whitechapel roared the cars, no one hindering them, for it was Sunday morning now and the streets were empty. Soon each car was doing over seventy, shooting smoothly over the long straight thoroughfares, due east towards the coast.

Clinging to his perilous perch, Nelson Lee fell to wondering how the Master of the World intended dealing with the police motor-patrols that would be out against him, and even as the thought crossed his mind, the Ice Ray appeared once more, a hundred yards ahead of the leading car.

He understood then. It reminded him of battle tactics in the Great War, a creeping barrage clearing the road ahead for advancing troops. Faster and faster grew the

speed of the cars until it was all the detective could do to maintain his position—which meant death if he failed—and now, as they flew along, he caught glimpses of huddled figures on the pavement, and occasionally the whole column swerved rapidly to avoid a car that stood derelict in the road, with its uniformed crew unconscious in their seats.

And still the nightmare race continued, with the terrible green light in front, mowing down obstacles. The city houses fell away, random fields flashed by. Barking was passed, Romford loomed up and dropped behind, then came Brentwood.

There the cars left the main road abruptly, and, switching off their headlights, began to cut across country to Billericay and beyond, until the gloom of a lonely countryside swallowed them up.

They stole past sleeping farms, their speed slackening as the roads grew rougher. Although they had no fear of pursuit, apparently, they seemed to be feeling their way, and of a sudden Nelson Lee lifted his head to see the leading car turn cautiously off the road through an open gate.

Its headlight flicked on at once, searching the open field before it, and when the long white beam came to rest at last, Nelson Lee made out a huge cabin biplane, squatting there in midfield like a great, sinister bird.

Three men clustered round her propeller, waving their arms in welcome. Her cabin door was open, and a short step-ladder had been let down to the ground.

Nelson Lee's keen mind took in the position swiftly. Having brought the stolen gold to this desolate rendezvous by car, the Master's men were to transfer it to a powerful airplane—a cunning plan in case the raiding fleet had been trailed!

In his eagerness to see more, the detective pulled himself to his hands and knees, confident that he would not be seen amid the darkness. He was thinking fast. If he lost touch with the gold, he must still contrive to follow Karl and the others by car. Meanwhile—and his heart grew bouyant at the thought—Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, was somewhere aloft.

Unknown to the bandits, unknown to anyone but Nelson Lee, the man who had so mercilessly stamped out the great Benton gang by the aid of his steel-feathered wings, would be up above—waiting. He would deal with the airplane!

In a long file, the cars were following their leader into the field, lurching and bumping over the hummocky grass. Nelson Lee smiled in keen triumph.

But the moment was short-lived. The last car wheeled to go through the gate, jolted clumsily into a cart rut, recovered with a violent shudder—and flung off the detective.

**Look out for a
Corking Extra
long St. Frank's
Yarn Next Week!**

Legs asprawl and arms outstretched, Nelson Lee went flying through the air, crashed his head against the gate-post and fell in a crumpled heap—unconscious!

SCARCELY ten seconds after Nelson Lee collapsed and slid quietly into a shallow ditch beside the gate, the Night Hawk dropped from the sky, dark-browed and anxious.

All through the long run from London he had never been more than fifty yards above the cars, marvelling at Lee's bulldog tenacity in clinging to his dangerous perch, despite the reckless speed of the retreat. It was the cruellest luck that disaster should have downed him with victory nearly in sight!

Kneeling, he took the detective's limp head on his lap, and a hiss of fury burst from his lips to find that Lee was badly stunned. His eyes, as he looked up and stared across the field, glittered with a cold fury that presently gave way to a deep, calculating gleam.

A change of plan was necessary now—and without delay.

He laid Nelson Lee carefully under cover and rose in the air on silent wings. High up in the dark sky, lost against the drifting black clouds, he watched the busy scene in midfield through the night glasses in his helmet.

The cars had been drawn into a circle, and in the glow of their side-lights, the men were busy stowing the bullion boxes into the cabin of the 'plane. A powerful craft she looked, with an all-steel body and slashing wings. But a dangerous little smile twisted the Night Hawk's lips as he thought out his "change of plan."

He intended to deal with these criminals in his own ruthless way from now on. With two bandit parties to fight instead of one, and Nelson Lee unconscious in a ditch, there was no hope of following both. Either the trail of the bank raiders must be given up, or this airplane allowed to escape with three million pounds in British gold!

Thurston Kyle laughed softly. Whatever happened, he was icily determined to capture the gold. And if he could not follow the raiding cars to their headquarters, he would strike at them—some other way.

The last box had been stowed in the 'plane and already her crew were climbing aboard.

"All the eggs in one basket!" laughed the Night Hawk to himself. "Bad tactics that, my friends!"

He heard the sharp explosive chatter of the great engine break out and throttle down to a smooth, sonorous roar. The 'plane ran forward, skimmed out of the radius of the car lights, and began to rise.

He watched her go with a contemptuous sneer. Heavily laden with men and gold, she disappeared sluggishly into the darkness towards the coast. Following her would be easy; for the moment, he had other work to do—below!

Pulling down the visor of his helmet, the Night Hawk wheeled gracefully on tilted wings, poising himself for a deadly dive into the little group of men on the ground. A pair of guns appeared in his hands like magic, and, extending them beyond his head, he flashed earthwards, straight and swift as an arrow.

Within pistol-shot, he banked magnificently and flung himself into the air again, eyes fixed on his prey. Something strange was happening: the man, Karl, was sending an urgent message of some kind through the ether with his twinkling instrument, and having finished, he turned suddenly and bolted into the darkness for his life.

Thurston Kyle stared intently, as did the plainly-bewildered drivers and men. An awful suspicion was growing on the Night Hawk that yet another horror was to be added to this night of terror.

It was. Out of nowhere, ringing men and cars at a single stroke with fiendish accuracy, the Fire Ray appeared! A harsh scream was ripped from the bandits as the gleam deepened to orange flame, and the Night Hawk whirled upwards instinctively. When he looked again, there was nothing. Men and cars had disappeared, blotted out of existence.

Thus the Master of the World repaid his servants, after carrying out the most daring raid in London history. Truly he meant to leave no trails behind!

The Night Hawk's face was terrible to see as, hissing through the night at amazing speed, he hurtled away in pursuit of the airplane. His steel feathered wings clove the air in slashing drives, hurling him across the sky.

In five minutes, he was in her wake; in two more he had drawn abreast. He wasted no time; for he was a master of such attacks.

A stream of red fire from his left-hand gun shattered the tail-elevator into splinters. In a flash the great 'plane staggered foolishly, and the Night Hawk landed on her right wing. The pilot snapped back his side window and thrust out a white, panicky face—just in time to get a bullet squarely between his bolting eyes.

A hail of lead smashed the other windows, but the two men in the cabin took up the challenge desperately. At least they were no cowards. With the smooth precision of trained air-fighters, they thrust hand machine-guns through the broken panes, and Thurston Kyle, warned by instinct, had barely time to hurl himself off the wing before a swarm of bullets snarled past.

He flicked alongside once more, the air full of fiery jets as the bandits searched for him venomously. Although her pilot lay dead in the cockpit, the 'plane still roared on, for her stabiliser was "set."

Gathering himself together, Thurston Kyle flung through space like a vengeful demon. His hand flashed to the back of his

belt and came up holding a small black egg, which he threw with all his force straight into the cabin windows. At the same moment he twisted and dived for safety: just in time.

A great purple flash split the darkness, followed by the crash of an explosion. The tail and wings of the 'plane flew off as though giant fingers had plucked them, and accompanied by a blazing comet of fire, the fuselage dipped and slid brilliantly towards the ground.

Swinging above in circles, the Night Hawk saw a huge splash of flame leap skywards as she crashed. He flung back his head, laughing aloud. Somewhere beneath that blazing wreck lay three million pounds in bullion, buried beneath a blue-red furnace, but safe.

Still laughing in triumph, he swept his wide, curved wings upwards and flew back to the aid of his ally, Nelson Lee.

At the eleventh hour all the plans, the cunning, the smashing onslaught of the Master of the World had been defeated!

IT was two day later. In the wonderful laboratory at Thurston Kyle's secluded house, Nelson Lee lounged at ease, smiling across at his sombre-faced host and listening to Nipper and Snub Hawkins ragging each other at one of the benches, for the two lads were on chaffing terms already.

The detective still felt the effects of his fall from the car, but his eyes were clear and confident. The great world outside, from pole to pole, seethed with the news of the amazing attack on London; Sir Hugh

Fletcher was on the verge of a breakdown, and authorities in all countries were discussing the Twin Rays that had smashed a police force and pierced the Bank of England to the heart. Would it be their turn next?

No less amazing was the discovery of the stolen gold beneath the ashes of an airplane on a lonely Essex marsh. From first to last Scotland Yard was without a clue as to where the rays were operated from, how the airplane crashed so luckily—and who was the Master of the World.

As for the Master himself, he had made no further move. Either his unexpected defeat had worried him into cautiousness, or he was skulking. No fresh attacks had been made.

Thurston Kyle broke in on the detective's thoughts, pushing across his lacquered box of priceless cigars.

"Well, Lee!" he said in his deep, vibrant tones. "Let us smoke to our first victory together!"

"Thanks mainly to you!" smiled Nelson Lee. "You're the trump card the Master of the World knows nothing about. We've beaten off the first attack. Now to follow up those clues!"

Yet as the two strange friends shook hands silently, the same thought showed in the eyes of each.

When would the next battle be fought?

THE END.

(A real gripper that yarn, eh, chums? Another exciting detective-thriller by John Brearley, featuring Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk, will appear shortly. Look out for it!)

THE FAGS' UNION!

(Continued from page 9.)

"Her!" gurgled Wilson.

"Yes, her!" cried Vera. "This isn't a fag at all, but a girl friend of mine dressed up."

The unfortunate Wilson nearly had a fit, and he went hot and cold in turns. Later, he apologised—when Vera brought Annie down in her ordinary clothes.

Wilson could scarcely believe it at first. Annie, in her silk stockings, neat frock and close-fitting hat, was surprisingly pretty. Wilson felt faint when he remembered what he had done.

"Well, I hope it has proved to you that you're all wrong," said Annie indignantly. "These fags are right. You're too severe with them—and you ought to remember that they are just as human as you are. Why shouldn't you let them play football?"

"We will!" promised Wilson desperately. "I give you my word for it, Miss Russell! I'm more sorry than I can say about—about—"

"If you don't mind, we won't refer to that subject again," interrupted Annie, wincing. "I'm glad you've promised. Do you promise, too, that you'll agree to what Willy Hand-

forth wants? He says he'll drop the union completely if you seniors will only—"

"We'll do anything!" interrupted Wilson, who was ready to promise the earth to atone for his blunder. "I'll make the other seniors agree even if I have to use a hammer."

He may not have used a hammer, but it was very evident that he used eloquent argument. For from that moment the strike was tacitly off, and the seniors, when they wanted a fag, put up with the best material they could get.

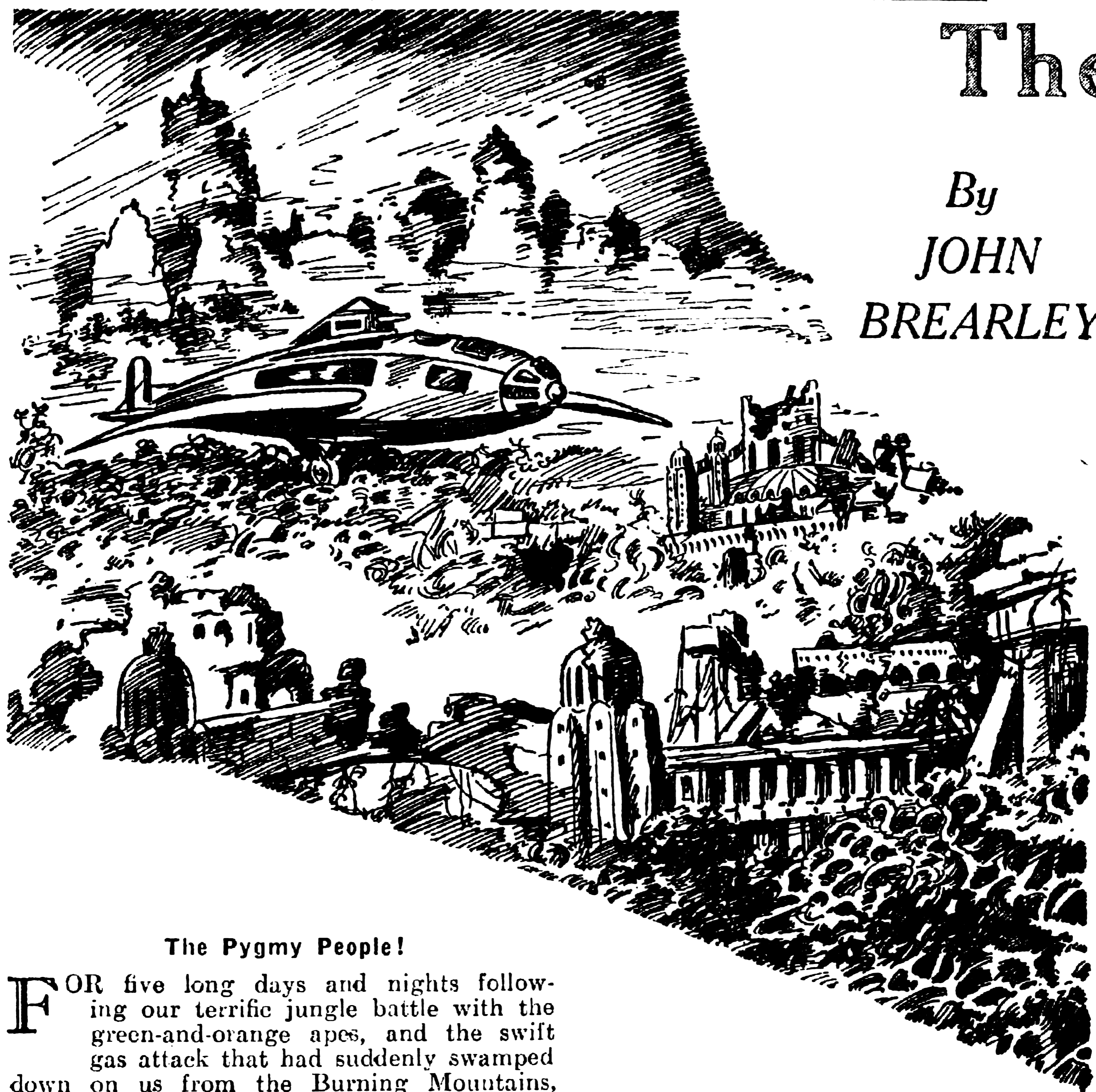
It was a triumph for Willy Handforth, for he was able to get his football team into shape; but he did not forget that Annie Russell, all unconsciously, had really worked the oracle.

As for Annie herself, none of the other girls at Moor View School could ever understand why, for several days, she seemed to have taken a violent dislike to chairs or seating accommodation of any kind.

THE END.

(Next week's St. Frank's yarn is an EXTRA-LONG one—and it's a real corker, too! Make a note of the title, chums—"K.K.'s Secret!"—and order your copy in advance.)

Tom and Mark Experience More Amazing Adventures in—



The

By
**JOHN
BREARLEY**

The Pygmy People!

FOR five long days and nights following our terrific jungle battle with the green-and-orange apes, and the swift gas attack that had suddenly swamped down on us from the Burning Mountains, Mark Whitaker and I, in our Space-ship, The Meteor, cruised over the violet sea of the Invisible World.

It was a queer experience, sailing blindly through a twilight sky, countless miles away from our own native Earth, wanderers in an unknown world of terror.

The Invisible World, Mark explained, was much smaller than our own—the tiniest planet, in fact, that he knew—and save for the vast plain, strewn with red forests that stretched to the redder mountains, we saw no more signs of vegetation or life. Occasional islands and big stretches of barren volcanic rock we came across, lying stark and dead amid the placid, stormless seas, and that was all.

All the time we cruised we kept carefully out of range of the jungle and mountains, however, for now we knew definitely that

the glowing crimson peaks were inhabited by dangerous foes, and Mark wanted time to prepare and lay plans for action. My own idea of strategy was to wade through the deadly gas clouds, protected by our ship, and hammer the stuffing out of those mountains with our turret gun. But when I suggested it, Mark only smiled to himself and bent closer to his workbench.

The Third Adventure: **GODS OF LEBANU!**

And then, of course, we had the pygmies—two women and ten men, the only human beings we had found so far, and all that remained of the party we had rescued from the clutches of the apes.

Taking it by and large, those five days were not frightfully interesting to me—I felt rather out of it. I had learnt to manage the marvellous Light-engines that drove the Meteor, and was gradually getting the hang of a few other gadgets, although the greater

INVISIBLE WORLD!

part of Mark's dials, switches and instruments were still so much Greek to me. So I spent most of my time in the driving-seat forward, or wistfully tinkering with our spiteful little gun—about the one thing I understood thoroughly!

Mark, however, was having a great time. His workbench was a spider's web of wires, connected to a dynamo which snarled and whined all day long; and now and then a dazzling blue flash darted across the cabin, sending the pygmies diving for cover and even making me jump at times.

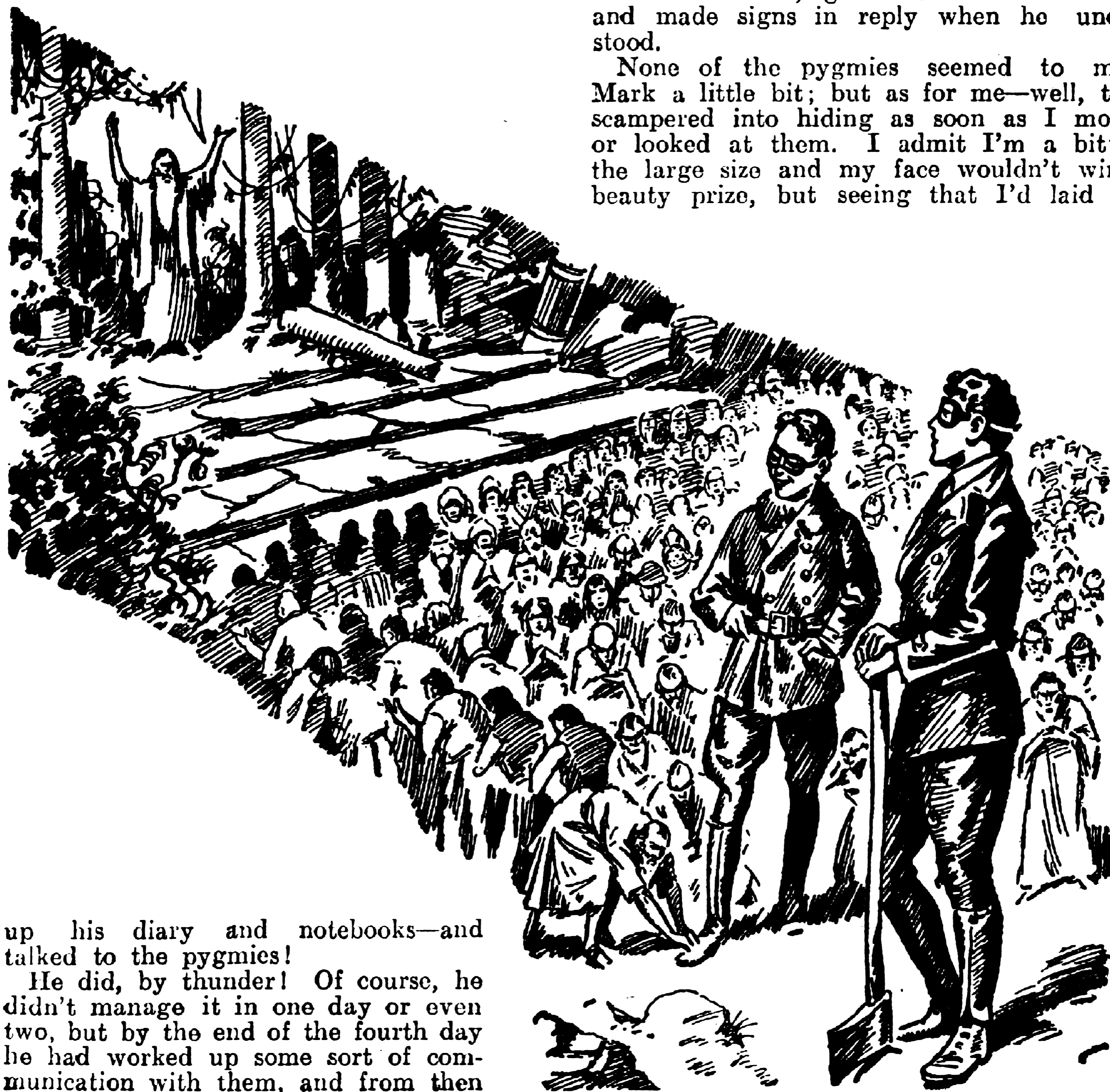
As usual, when he was wrapt up in anything, Mark had little time for conversation, and his replies to my own few remarks consisted entirely of grunts and growls. Hour after hour he worked at his bench, wrote

onwards it was one long jaw with the leader of the little folk.

They were a funny crowd—poor, half-starved, and mostly scared to death of everything. They were human all right, faintly bronzed in colour, and except that their legs were too long for their little bodies and the tallest was well under two feet in height, were well-proportioned and not bad-looking.

Their leader was a handsome, dignified old chap about twenty inches high, with a long yellow beard to his knees, and dressed like the others in a tattered robe made of tough, woven grass. The others kow-towed to him most humbly, but Mark hoisted him on to the table, and there they sat all day, the leader twittering away like a little scared bird and waving his thin arms, while Mark listened to him, grave as a Chinese idol, and made signs in reply when he understood.

None of the pygmies seemed to mind Mark a little bit; but as for me—well, they scampered into hiding as soon as I moved or looked at them. I admit I'm a bit on the large size and my face wouldn't win a beauty prize, but seeing that I'd laid out



up his diary and notebooks—and talked to the pygmies!

He did, by thunder! Of course, he didn't manage it in one day or even two, but by the end of the fourth day he had worked up some sort of communication with them, and from then

green-and-orange apes galore and got my leather suit torn to shreds, not to mention my forehead cut open by a stone on their behalf, I thought they might have been a little more matey. But no; the moment I lifted a finger they dived beneath the bunks and stayed there till Mark hauled them out.

It was on the fifth day, while I was sitting around feeling bored stiff, and Mark and the old man had been jawing for hours, that my shrewd chum suddenly leapt to his feet and came over to me, dark eyes blazing with excitement.

"Got it, Tom—got it, by Jove!" he cried in a shaky voice.

"Got what?" I growled, half-asleep.

He clapped me on the shoulder—hard.

"Their language—enough of it, anyway, to understand something of the history of the Invisible World!"

"Then ask them why the dickens they're all so scared of me!" I snorted; whereupon he laughed mysteriously and drew up a chair, at the same time beckoning to the old leader. The venerable pygmy crawled towards me on all fours and cowered down behind Mark's chair as though fearing I would eat him!

"Tom," cried Mark impressively, "the real name of this world is Lebanu! These people are the Lebanunes!"

I sat up then, interested at last. Trust Mark to find out something solid. He pointed to the old man.

"This is Onada. He is the king and high priest of the nation—or what is left of it. As far as I can make out, this is the yarn he tells:

"Once on a time the Lebanunes, the only human race on the planet, were the rulers—and a very cultured race, too. They had cities, towns and roads covering all that plain we've just left, and most of the jungle was under cultivation right to the feet of the Burning Mountains—which, incidentally, were never explored on account of their colossal size.

"Well, somewhere about a hundred years ago, I make it, all the mountain tops suddenly broke into a red glare as though they were on fire. Even while the Lebanunes were watching and wondering, the glow spread rapidly through the whole range—all in one day—and presently curious smoke-rings began to spurt from the highest points."

"Just as we saw the other day?" I whispered tensely.

Mark nodded.

"Yes. And within a week of that first attack, Tom, the powerful Lebanune nation was completely shattered! First, whole cities were wiped out by gas and left deserted; the people fled into open country, mad with fear and beyond all discipline; and then—out of the glowing mountain range—came another race of beings!

"The Fire People, Onada calls them. They captured thousands of his folk and swept them

up into the mountains—whether as slaves or sacrifices no one knows. The rest, scattering through the wide land, tried to hide themselves, although scores were picked off from time to time by the gas.

"Years went by, and soon the jungle claimed the cultivated fields again, and next the cities and towns until at last all trace of them was swallowed up. Since then the Lebanunes have led dogs' lives: hounded by the apes, swept up by the Fire People and also by Things that attack them from the air—Flying Devils, as Onada describes 'em. A few have struggled on all through the years, living miserably among the ruins of their chief city, which is surrounded by thorns in the thickest part of the jungle. But none of them can call his soul his own, and every hour may be his last!"

I whistled long and low.

"Poor beggars. What are these Fire People like, Mark?"

My friend's face clouded and he shook his head.

"That's where I fall down!" he growled. "I've tried and tried again to get their description from Onada, but he absolutely funks talking about them. Just shuts up like an oyster. The others are the same; scared pallid at the very mention of them!"

"They must be a tough lot!" I muttered, staring through the starboard window to where, far away on the gloomy horizon, the Burning Mountains shone redly through the violet mists of Lebanu. The Fire People! We had seen the effect of their smoke-rings, and we owed them a shot in return. Now, at the pitiful history of these pygmies, my blood boiled.

There was something uncannily horrible about that immense wall of crimson light. I felt as though it was not the people there, but the mountains themselves I was up against. To me, the whole mass seemed alive, watching us; for whichever way we turned we could see it always, pale red one minute, furnace-hot the next.

It was literally like a red rag to a bull to me. I longed to have a smack at them.

"Well—what's the programme?" I snapped abruptly, staring hard at Mark, then at the cowering pygmies. My muscles ached to use the new strength I had found in this Invisible World. "Are we going to fool about over this sea much longer?"

Mark's lips curved in a slow, strange smile, and his high forehead was scored by thoughtful lines.

"No," he replied softly, "not much longer, lad. First of all, we're going to take these little people home—to their lost city of Xemos, somewhere in the jungle. And after that—"

Something in his manner made me catch my breath and lean forward eagerly.

"Yes. After that?" I gasped.

"We're going to straighten out this land of Lebanu!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "We're going to re-conquer it—you and I



"I found myself attacked by a large horde of the horrible Flying Devils."

and the Meteor, Tom! The apes, the Flying Devils—we'll destroy them completely. And we'll give the Lebanunes back their kingdom!"

Caught by the fiery words and the magnificence of the idea, I leapt up, too, grabbing his hand. Mark's a little chap, but he's got the fighting spirit of a wildcat.

"And what about the Fire People?" I whooped.

He gripped me tightly and smiled in my face.

"I'll attend to them, Tom—in good time. And with weapons that will knock their smoke clouds silly!"

My gleeful laugh sent the pygmies scuttling under the bunks once more!

Another Gas Attack!

FIVE minutes later we had cleared for action, and Mark was heading the Meteor back towards the land, eating up the leagues of sea with effortless ease, our engines purring beneath their prismatic glass covers.

As we drew ever nearer it was easy to see that our enemies must have been watching us constantly, for the closer we approached,

the angrier grew the colour of the mountains, until they blazed at us hatefully.

As soon as our ship slid over the coastline the bright light I had seen before sparkled on the loftiest peak. We both knew what that meant now—smoke-rings! And before we had gone far they were spinning across the jungle towards us, bursting until they formed a thick brown cloud.

In the cabin our tiny passengers chattered and squealed and pointed, but we knew we were safe enough. Fast though the smoke-rings travelled, they could not touch the Meteor for speed. Mark was dodging and twisting on and off the land at 300 miles an hour, taking care that not a single breath of gas so much as touched us.

I must say I admired old Onada then; he stood his ground like a troop. Even if the gas had hit us it meant little more than a feeling of nausea to either Mark or myself, but it meant death to the old king, and he knew it. Yet he stood, grave and upright, by the driving-seat, pointing to various landmarks, piloting us towards the ancient city of Xemos buried amid the tangled forests.

After a while it must have dawned on the Fire People that their dread gas attack

was a false alarm as far as we were concerned, for as quickly as it had begun the bombardment stopped. The glare of the mountains faded to a sullen smoulder. It was as though they watched us loweringly, uncertain what to do next.

Mark chuckled contentedly, and the Meteor sank to a touch of his hand.

Studying the landscape through the window in the floor, I saw we were heading inland towards a mass of hideous trees, swamps and rocky deserts. A foul-looking country. The trees there were higher than elsewhere—some of them six or seven feet tall, and as the Meteor glided just above their tops, their gnarled, twisted branches writhed beneath us like millions of scaly serpents weaving about the land.

In between them, filling up every space, were great thick vines bearing murderous thorns, through which nothing could have passed, not even the terrible green-and-orange apes. The Lebanunes were all excitement now, capering about and pointing downwards eagerly, while even old Onada had forgotten his dignity. At last he reached up and touched Mark with a thin, detaining hand.

We looked below; we saw nothing save the welter of vegetation. Looking again, however, something struck us. We could see tiny paths leading through the undergrowth, and next instant my eyes caught the dull glimmer of half-buried stonework.

"We're there, Mark!" I called.

He raised his hand and began circling slowly overhead. It was plain he was puzzled how to land where no possible landing-place existed; but at last, with a characteristic shrug, he slid the great torpedo craft gently to earth, flattening the trees like so much grass.

And there the Meteor came to rest—in a stunted primeval forest on Lebanu, the Invisible World!

Xemos, the Buried City!

THE very second I opened the sliding door and let down the ladder, the Lebanunes, men and women, were out and away. One moment they were in sight, the next the red trees hid them completely. Years of terror and oppression

had certainly turned our pygmy friends into expert woodsmen!

One remained with us, though: Onada the King. He stood in the clearing, his venerable head lower than my knee, and pointed to one of the narrow paths that twisted in among the trees. Chuckling, I turned to Mark, half-way down the ladder.

"Golly, that's all right for O'Hara, or whatever he's called," I grinned, "but we're sunk! The path's not more than six inches wide, and those thorns'll tear us to bits!"

Without a word Mark turned back, re-appearing with a hefty pioneer's axe in his hand. I took it, laughing, and soon trees, vines and thorns were flying into the air as I hacked a decent pathway for us to walk through.

Thus it came about that, swinging the gleaming axe vigorously, I was the first to stride into the strangest, smallest, yet most wondrous city that had ever existed even in my wildest dreams.

Exactly how much ground it had covered in its palmy days we never discovered, for the jungle trees and thorn-vines still held most of its buildings in a fast grip. The space in which we found ourselves now was scarcely more than a hundred yards square, but it was enough to show that once on a day Xemos had been a glorious city and its people as clever and as intelligent as any on our own Earth.

Everywhere we looked we saw the remains of lovely temples and palaces, built of a glittering topaz stone that Mark told me was some kind of quartz. The centre of the city had once been broad and noble, but was littered now with slender, fallen columns and chunks of masonry. Splendid roads, choked with loathsome weeds and blocked by thorns, led out of it, and on one side the ruins of a great triumphal arch lurked amid the evil trees.

Some of the palaces must have been thirty yards high and more—a dizzy height for this strange land where everything save the awesome mountains was so small.

For a while we could only stare at the ruined splendour of it all in tight-lipped silence. But our resolve to do battle with the Fire People strengthened a thousand times there and then!

In the brooding violet light the place was as hushed and as empty as a graveyard. An eerie feeling gripped us.

While we stood there, hesitating, old Onada left us and stalked majestically across the square to the splendid steps of what had once been the chief temple, a mighty building still.

In spite of his woeful thinness and old age, the King of Lebanu made a dramatic figure as, standing there in his tattered robe, he spread out his arms and broke suddenly into a thin, high chant that echoed through the ancient city and the jungle.

WHEN YOU'RE AT THE SEASIDE

buy your copy of the NELSON LEE from one of the Old Paper's representatives who are to be seen at all the principal seaside resorts. If you do this you will receive a packet of "Chelsea" Toffees

FREE!

Immediately from all quarters, soundless as ghosts, came the little people, the Lebanunes. On hands and knees, heads bent, they crawled to the temple steps and remained there, not a soul among them daring to lift his head while their old king spoke.

At a rough guess there were about two hundred there, no more; all that was left of a once-mighty nation which now lurked amid tumbled buildings, with fierce thorns as their only protection against the apes, and no shelter at all against their other foes. I looked at Mark, and his lean face was working. It was a pitiful sight.

When all were assembled old Onada began a new, wild speech that, for all his reedy voice, sounded somehow bold and inspiring. He waved his arms towards us continually, his yellow beard bristled and his head was flung back proudly. He was a grand old chap, a warrior to the teeth, putting fresh heart into his sorrow-worn subjects.

After a while the torrent of words ceased; the crowd answered in a soft, timid murmur. Turning all together, they came slowly to Mark's feet where he stood beside me, and one by one they touched his boots humbly and retired.

Then—they all turned again, and crouched in rigid silence—before me!

I hate fuss of any kind. Puzzled and uncomfortable, I began to edge away, getting red and hot all over. What the deuce was the game? I expected the little beggars to worship old Mark; but why they should freeze like this before me was too much. I frowned at the outlandish picture, the background of broken palaces and snarling jungle, and then an explanation dawned on me.

It must be my size and the axe I held—they were afraid of me! Gosh, I felt sorry for 'em. Anxious to reassure them, I edged away still farther and swung the axe out of sight behind my back.

That did it! Oh, my hat, the scene when that axe-blade glittered for a second in the violet sunlight! With a single piercing shriek the Lebanunes fell backwards, scrambled, fought and kicked their way to the steps of the temple, where one and all they collapsed, stiff and nerveless with fear.

"Wha-what the——" I stammered indignantly to Mark, who was shaking with inward laughter; and at the sound of my voice the Lebanunes wailed again and sank closer than ever to the ground.

To my utter astonishment and fury, Mark bowed very low, salaaming deeply.

"Hail, Thomas Lyle, God of Lebanu!" he boomed solemnly. Then: "You big chump!" he hissed. "Can't you see? They think you're a god. It's your terrific size and strength. Onada has commanded them all to worship you and beg that you will protect them with your mighty arms as you did

against the apes. When you lifted that axe, they took it for a sign that you refused and were angry! O powerful and warlike Thomas——"

He broke off with a sudden cry, and pointed at the sky, his face hard and grim. At the same time came a terrified yell from the Lebanunes, followed by a wild panic.

A single upward glance was enough. In two giant strides I reached the temple steps, and there, with the tall building behind me, I flipped out my gun and whirled the axe aloft.

If I were a god, now was the time for me to protect my "people." For the air was full of the mysterious Flying Devils!

The Flying Devils!

IN another second they were upon us—flocks of them, darkening the air with their dry, rustling wings.

They were like enormous grasshoppers in appearance, with bodies five feet long, hard and rigid. Their jointed, spidery legs were as smooth and as flexible as rapiers, and every movement of their sightless heads displayed their powerful jaws!

Filling the air with a harsh rattle, they swarmed into the clearing, fighting each other viciously to get at their victims. Helter-skelter ran the Lebanunes in maddest terror, dying horribly as the Devils scooped them up and cut them in two with a slash of their razor jaws. Some escaped into the jungle, others into the ruins, and the winged fiends hovered above, searching for them patiently.

The moment they were within range I let drive with my gun, and three dropped into the square, writhing and snapping. A claw gripped my shoulder and I slashed it with the axe, while two others closed in and were beaten off with lead. In the moment's breathing-space I glanced sideways to see how Mark was faring, and my heart gave a sickening leap when I saw him bolting at top speed for the jungle path, pursued by the Devils, at whom he fired as he ran.

Mark—running away! Face white and eyes blazing, I met the zigzag rush of another brute, snapped off a hind leg with a bullet and, stepping in, swung the axe with all my strength squarely into its face.

The keen blade, hissing venomously, buried itself to the haft, the creature reared up and fell—too swiftly for me to dodge. Down I went beneath its heavy body, helpless and half-stupefied by the suffocating liquid that gushed from its twitching body.

So I lay there, out of the fight; my new "subjects" scattered; and Mark—why had he deserted? It was the worst moment of my life! And then, while I struggled wearily, my heart leapt again, for out of the red jungle rose the Meteor, slowly and

(Continued on page 44.)



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler sent it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

NOW YOU KNOW!

Teacher: "What is wasted energy?"

Boy: "Telling hair-raising stories to a bald-headed man."

(J. Watson, 62, Glendevon Place, Edinburgh, has been awarded a penknife.)

DEAD-BEAT BEAT!

A young and keen P.C. was being shown over his new night beat by the sergeant.

"D'ye see that red light in the distance? Well, that is the end of your beat. Now get along with it."

The young P.C. set out and was not seen again for several days. When he did show up, the sergeant demanded furiously where he had been.

"Ye remember that red light?" asked the P.C.

"Yes."

"Well, it was a moving van bound for Newcastle. I've just arrived back from there."

(W. Rivers, 89, Lorne Street, Kidderminster, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SIMILAR!

Guide: "This, sir, is the Leaning Tower of Pisa."

American tourist: "Pisa? Let me think. No, that doesn't sound like the name of the contractor who built my garage, but it looks like his work."

(Miss Alice Latham, 103, Cooper Street, St. Helens, Lancs, has been awarded a penknife.)

CHUCKED IN FREE!

A farmer who wished to investigate the alleged "huge profits" of the middle salesman sold a gross of eggs to a shop in London. On one of the eggs he wrote: "I received three-halfpence for this egg. How much did you pay?"

Some weeks later he received a reply on the notepaper of a theatre: "I had this egg given to me absolutely gratis."

(S. Meat, 100, Hucknall Lane, Bulwell, Nottingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HOW IT HAPPENED!

Little Emily ran into the house crying as though her heart would break.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked her mother.

"My dolly—Billy broke it!" she sobbed.

"How did he break it, dear?"

"I hit him on the head with it."

(D. Riddell, 3, Roseberry Street, Aberdeen, has been awarded a penknife.)

PRESENCE OF MIND.

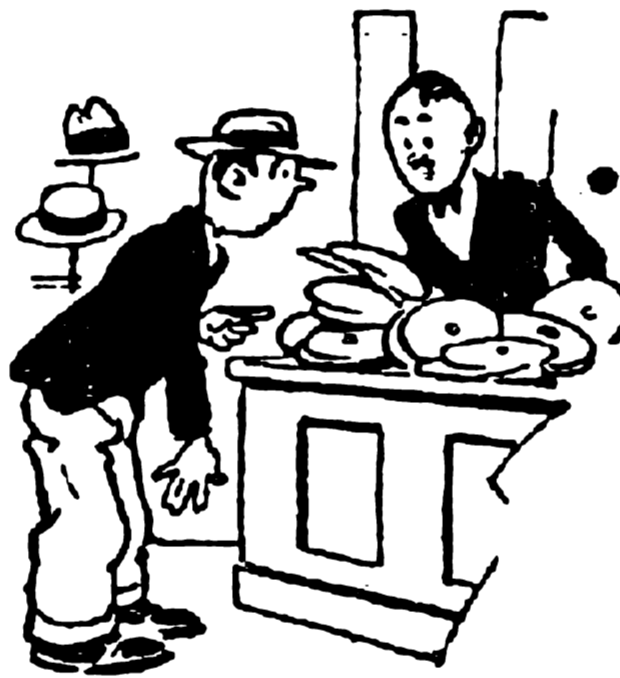
A few minutes after an alarm of fire was given in a hotel, one of the guests joined the group that were watching the fire and chaffed them on their apparent excitement.

"There was nothing to be excited about," he said. "I took my time about dressing, lit a cigarette, didn't like the knot in my neck-tie, so tied it over again—that's how cool I was."

"Fine," one of his friends remarked, "but why didn't you put on your trousers?"

(B. Thompson, Sutterton Road, Boston, Lincs., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE BEST JOKE OF THE WEEK!



THAT CAPPED IT!

A smart young fellow entered a hatter's shop and asked to try on some caps. The shopkeeper showed him dozens, but the man wasn't satisfied.

"What sort of cap is it you want?" asked the shopkeeper at last.

"Well," said the young man, "I've just bought a motor-bike and I want a cap with the peak at the back!"

(J. Gardner, Priora's Wood Cottage, Nr. Taunton, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

HEAR, HEAR!

Prospective M.P. (at noisy election meeting): "What you all want is educational reform, housing reform, taxation reform —"

Voice at the back of the hall: "And what you want is chloroform."

(E. Mould, 144, Little Green Lane, Small Heath, Birmingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

EXCUSE THE EXCUSE!

Head prefect (interrupting a midnight pillow-fight): "How do you come to be out of bed, Browne?"

Browne (on spur of moment): "I got out to tuck myself in."

(G. Edwards, 1, Brynglas Terrace, Bryncock, nr. Neath, Wales, has been

awarded a pocket wallet.)

CAUGHT!

Master (to boy he has noticed looking over another's paper): "Jones minor, you are cribbing from Smith."

Smith (aggrieved): "No, sir, I'm not. He hasn't written anything yet that I didn't know."

(R. Oldfield, 44, Harside Street, Worksop, Notts, has been awarded a penknife.)

UNFAIR ON THE PILLAR-BOX!

Pedestrian (to driver of baby car that has hit a pillar-box): "I admit your car's on the small side, but I don't think you should have tried to send it by letter post."

(G. Bedingfield, 35, Claremont Street, Sussex Street, Brighton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

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THE HIKERS

Ordered Off!

TONY RIDGERS and Eric Gale walked down the lane with diffi-

culty. They walked with difficulty because both of them were nearly doubled up with laughter.

The Hikers had just had another encounter with Mr. Slivey. Mr. Slivey, of the long whiskers, was a knife-grinder; he was also a thorough rascal—though Eric and Tony had to admit that there was something likeable about him—and he and the Hikers had had many tussles. The latest encounter had ended “all square.”

Mr. Slivey had received a large, ripe, juicy tomato full in the eye—flung with unerring aim by Tony—while Bloop, the third member of the Hikers, who were on a go-as-you-please walking tour, had received a bucket of horrible, evil-smelling paste over him. Mr. Slivey was now gone; and Tony and Eric were looking for Bloop. Walking down the steep winding lane which ended at the river, they found him.

He had washed his shoes, and these were drying on the bank. His shirt and stockings, tied to an overhanging branch, were swaying in the current to soak the mouldy paste out of them.

shorts. Unruffled and very unconcerned, he was reading a page from an old newspaper he had picked up.

“Feeling better, old thing?” Eric asked.

“I’m feeling distinctly cleaner and less sticky,” said Bloop. “Produce a towel, Tony, and I’ll crawl ashore. Pouf! What vile stuff! I hope I haven’t poisoned all the fish in the stream. Old Slivey—may his

whiskers mildew—is a man of his word. He said he’d get me, and he did.”

“Tony got him, too, with a tomato—about the prettiest shot I ever saw,” grinned Eric. “He was just cracking his sides with glee when it caught him, and I’ll bet he’ll hate the very sight of a tomato for years.”

Leaving Bloop to change, Eric explored the upstream bank and Tony went downstream to explore. There were plenty of charming sites all suitable for a camp, but Eric’s choice fell on a spot where a fallen tree offered a fine diving-board into a deep, quiet pool.

“It’s the goods,” said Bloop when he saw the place. “You chaps pitch the tent while

**“THREE MEN IN A BOAT”
try conclusions with the
Hikers—and wish that they
hadn’t!**

I make another bid for some milk, and I hope I shan't make the sticky job of it I did last time. Gosh! Before I fell into the river I was nearly choked with the smell of the stuff."

"And you looked a jolly sight worse than you smelt," commented Eric.

"Then I must have looked worse than awful," shuddered Bloop.

Bloop took the milk-can and sauntered off, whistling, while his chums pitched the tent.

"I say, Eric, that seemed a longish hike, but we haven't come far," remarked Tony. "The old river must twist like a corkscrew, for if that isn't a back view of the squire's chimney-pots I'm a bad guesser."

"It looks like 'em," Eric agreed. "As the flea cries—I mean as the fly crows—oh, drat it! As the crow flies we can only have come about three miles, but as we're not foot-slogging to break records, that doesn't matter very much. What have we got in the grub line except tinned stuff?"

"Those two eels," said Tony. "I skinned 'em last night and they're still nice and fresh."

"Then eat 'em yourself or sling 'em back into the river," said Eric with a shudder. "Like old Bloop, I hate the slimy water-snakes. We'll make a shift on sardines, bread-and-butter and tea, and then buzz round to see what we can do for the larder."

Tony attended to the primus stove and filled the kettle, and then they lay down on the grass to wait for Bloop. Across the stream Tony saw a fox that seemed to have come from nowhere at all, helping himself to a drink. The fox either saw or scented them, for it sprang sideways and vanished as quickly and as mysteriously as it had come.

"Old Bloop's one of the very best, but he'll always be a puzzle to me," said Eric after a silence. "I don't think he's a bit angry with Slivey. It's more than likely that if he meets the old hog again, he'll present him with a couple of pound notes for his cheek."

"Just what he would do," said Tony. "The young squire likes a chap who doesn't know when he's beaten, even if he's only a rascal like Slivey."

Tired of doing nothing, Tony looked about for a forked peg to make a catapult. He had wanted to bring an air-gun with him, but owing to Bloop's objection, he had left it behind. Within twenty minutes the catapult was ready for action.

"What's that popping noise?" asked Eric, sitting up.

Tony said a motor-boat, and was right. The motor-boat contained two youths in flannels and striped blazers, a camping outfit, and also a pale man in a black coat.

"Geel! Some louts have jumped our claim," said the youth who was steering, in a tone of disgust.

Eric and Tony lay back with closed eyes and made faint snoring noises.

"Hi, you fellows, there, wake up!" cried another voice. "I say, you know, this won't

do at all, you know. You're trespassin' and you've got to get out."

Eric and Tony continued to snore.

"Sling me that canvas bucket, Oscar," said the steersman, who had red hair, "and if they're not awake, I'll soon waken them with a sousing. Water's the thing they hate most, that and soap. Hi, you sweeps, wake up!"

The two hikers started out of their pretended slumbers, and at that moment Bloop came sauntering up at his usual lazy pace, swinging the milk-can at his side.

"What's all this jolly row about?" asked Eric. "Is it a fire or something?"

"Oh, you're taking notice at last are you?" said the pilot of the launch. "Well, you've got to pack up and shift—and shift a jolly long way off, too. We're from Banterbridge Academy and we always camp here, so get those rags and that beastly old truck of yours out of the way as soon as you like. Go ashore and give 'em a hand, Whiffman."

"Certainly, Mr. Mortimer, sir," said the pale man humbly. "At once, sir."

Mr. Whiffman, valet and gymnastic instructor to the young gentlemen in the flannels and blazers, stepped out of the motor-launch.

"You'll kindly pack up at once and let me help you," he said. "This camping-pitch belongs to these two gentlemen. It's reserved for Banterbridge Academy and has been for years."

Eric and Tony rose to their feet, and lazy Bloop, with a curious look in his dark eyes, leaned against a tree.

"Don't you be in such a jolly old hurry," said Eric Gale. "We don't know who you are and we don't want to, but we bagged this pitch first, so you'd better shove your old stink-boat somewhere else and find another pitch for yourselves."

"They ain't going, Mr. Mortimer and Mr. Oscar," said the valet, "or they say they ain't."

"Then we'll chuck 'em out," said Mr. Mortimer, springing ashore.

Mr. Mortimer, the lanky red-haired youth, was about seventeen. His friend Mr. Oscar stepped out of the launch after him. Oscar, who was of about the same age, but shorter and plumper, seemed to wish to avoid trouble.

"Oh, go easy for a bit, Mortimer," he said. "Look here, you fellows, you've bagged our favourite camping-ground you know, so do be sensible and all that, you see, and pack up and jolly well vamoose and all that. We don't want a fuss and all that rot, you know, and our man will give lots of help. But, you see, you've got to jolly well barge off, and that's that."

Bloop stepped forward.

"It's awfully kind of you," he said lazily. "But what's going to happen if we decline to barge off? If you've bought this particular piece of property, I should rather like to see your title-deeds."

Eric knew Bloop and the meaning of the dangerous light in his dark, lazy eyes.

"Trouble, Tony," he muttered, "tons of it! Old Bloop's getting his dander up."

"What's going to happen?" shouted the red-haired youth, pushing his angry face close to Bloop's. "We'll pitch you into the river and your rotten outfit after it."

"How awfully jolly of you," said Bloop. "Perhaps that will make you change your mind."

Bloop pulled his right hand out of the pocket of his shorts and hit out. Mr. Mortimer uttered a wild squeal and sat down in a bed of nettles, clutching his chin.

"That's for breathing on me," added Bloop. "There's nothing I object to more!"

The Rescuer!

MR. MORTIMER picked himself out of the nettles, his freckled face nearly as red as his hair. Bloop's punch had jarred him badly, especially his temper. He had a much longer reach than Bloop, who stood with clenched fists, waiting for his rush.

Oscar stepped between them.

"Go easy for a minute, Mortimer," he said. "We seem to have declared a jolly old war and all that sort of thing, but it's really too hot to fight and all that. It was a low trick to swipe you when you didn't expect it, but let's try to manage without a scrap. You three barges have bagged our perch, you know, and you've got to hop off it, so why not be sensible and friendly and get out without a hiding."

Bloop's answer was to turn and give the launch a push, sending it gliding away from the bank into the middle of the stream.

"There goes your dunnage, so chase it," he said. "There's a weir lower down, and if your boat goes over it, you may lose a few things and have to sleep in wet blankets."

Oscar had a milder temper than his friend Mortimer, but Bloop's audacity roused him to fury.

"You cad!" he yelled, and charged with brandished fists.

He was no light weight, and his rush would have swept Bloop into the river. But watchful Tony put out his foot, and Oscar tripped over it and went to earth with a bump.

For this little act of kindness to his chum, Tony received a bang over the car from Mortimer that set his head ringing like a peal of bells.

"Sling their dunnage into the river while we settle the common little pigs, Whiffman!" shouted the red-haired youth.

Then the trouble started at full speed. Bloop and Oscar, locked together, were rolling over and over on the grass, dangerously close to the edge of the bank, and the red-haired youth was aiming blows at Tony, which that nimble-footed youngster managed to dodge.

Eric was about to rush to Bloop's assistance when he was hauled back by the shirt collar and pinned against a tree by Mr. Whiffman.

"You keep out of it," said Mr. Whiffman, "and let 'em settle it. Boxing's my living, that and gymnastics, and if I was to hit you I might 'urt you a lot more than I want to."

Pressing Eric firmly against the tree with his right hand, he closed his left fist and held it uncomfortably close to the prisoner's nose.

"Your own mother won't know you with the face you'll get if I do hit you," added the gymnastic instructor warningly.

Realising his helplessness, and knowing by the pressure of his chest that Mr. Whiffman had trained muscles, Eric almost foamed at the mouth. Bloop had a grip on Oscar that made it impossible for Oscar to hit him. They strained, and heaved, and grunted, and rolled until they rolled a little too far.

The edge of the bank crumbled under their weight, and locked in each other's arms, though not in a loving embrace, Bloop and the Sixth-Form boy from Banterbridge Academy fell into the river with a huge splash.

So far the red-headed youth had not succeeded in hitting Tony once. He kept chasing him up and down the bank, but he only got hotter and angrier, for young Ridgers was fleet of foot and as nimble as a squirrel.

Just as Bloop and Oscar came to the surface, Tony dodged round the cart, and made a grab at the bag of tomatoes. Mortimer, panting and blowing and calling the runner a cowardly little cad, was in close pursuit.

Tony's first shot stopped him. It was not quite so large and ripe a tomato as the one with which he had floored Mr. Slivey, but it did good work. Even Eric, pushed hard against the tree with Whiffman's bone-knuckled fist threatening his nose, raised a whoop of delight as he saw Mortimer stagger.

"Well bowled, Tony, old thing!" he yelled. "Give the boulder more like it. Hand him out the lot to match his hair."

Bloop was scrambling ashore, and lower down Oscar was doing the same thing. The red-haired one scooped the tomato juice out of his eyes, seized the Hikers' cart, and gave it a violent push. In the nick of time Bloop stopped it, and saved it from plunging into the stream.

"Now we've got 'em, Oscar," howled Mortimer, still full of fight. "Come on! What are you holding that kid for, Whiffman? Knock him out and then sling their stuff overboard."

Mr. Whiffman made an ugly face and looked round. Leaving Tony to Oscar, Mortimer turned on Bloop, who was taken off his guard. His swinging blow went home, and Bloop reeled groggily. Tony was also taken off his guard, for Oscar came up behind him and pounced.

"It'll soon be over now," said Mr. Whiffman with a grin. "You ought to have cleared out when you were told. Ouch! Take that, you vicious little beast!"



Straining, heaving and grunting, Bloop and Oscar rolled over the edge of the bank into the river with a huge splash.

With the fortunes of the Hikers at such a low ebb, and victory within the enemy's grasp, Eric lost the last fragment of temper he had left and kicked. The kick hurt, and, yelping with pain and rage, Mr. Whiffman jerked back his arm to strike. And at that instant, like the fox Tony Ridgers had seen which apparently had come from nowhere at all, came a fist, and the fist saved Eric.

It hit Mr. Whiffman neatly on the point of the chin, and his arms dropped. With a silly grin on his face and an empty look in his eyes, he crumpled at the knees and fell.

The owner of the fist swung round, seized Oscar by the ears, and wrenched him away from Tony, and the next moment Eric's arm was round Mortimer's neck in a stranglehold, and the battle that had seemed lost was as good as won.

"I give in!" spluttered Mortimer.

On the chest of the fallen Oscar Mr. Slivey was seated: Mr. Slivey himself, complete with whiskers. With a twinkle in his fishy eyes, the knife-grinder gazed at the fallen gymnastic instructor, who was just awakening from his dream and was beginning to take notice.

"I ain't hit nobody such a lovely punch as that since I was a lad," he said. "And mind you, when I was a lad I could use 'em a treat."

"I think you'd better get up, Mr. Slivey," said Bloop, giving himself a shake. "It won't do you much good to sit on that wet lump. Do you chaps give in?"

"If you're bringing scallywags like that to fight us we can't do anything else," said Mortimer grumpily.

"Wha-wha-what's the matter?" asked Mr. Whiffman dazedly.

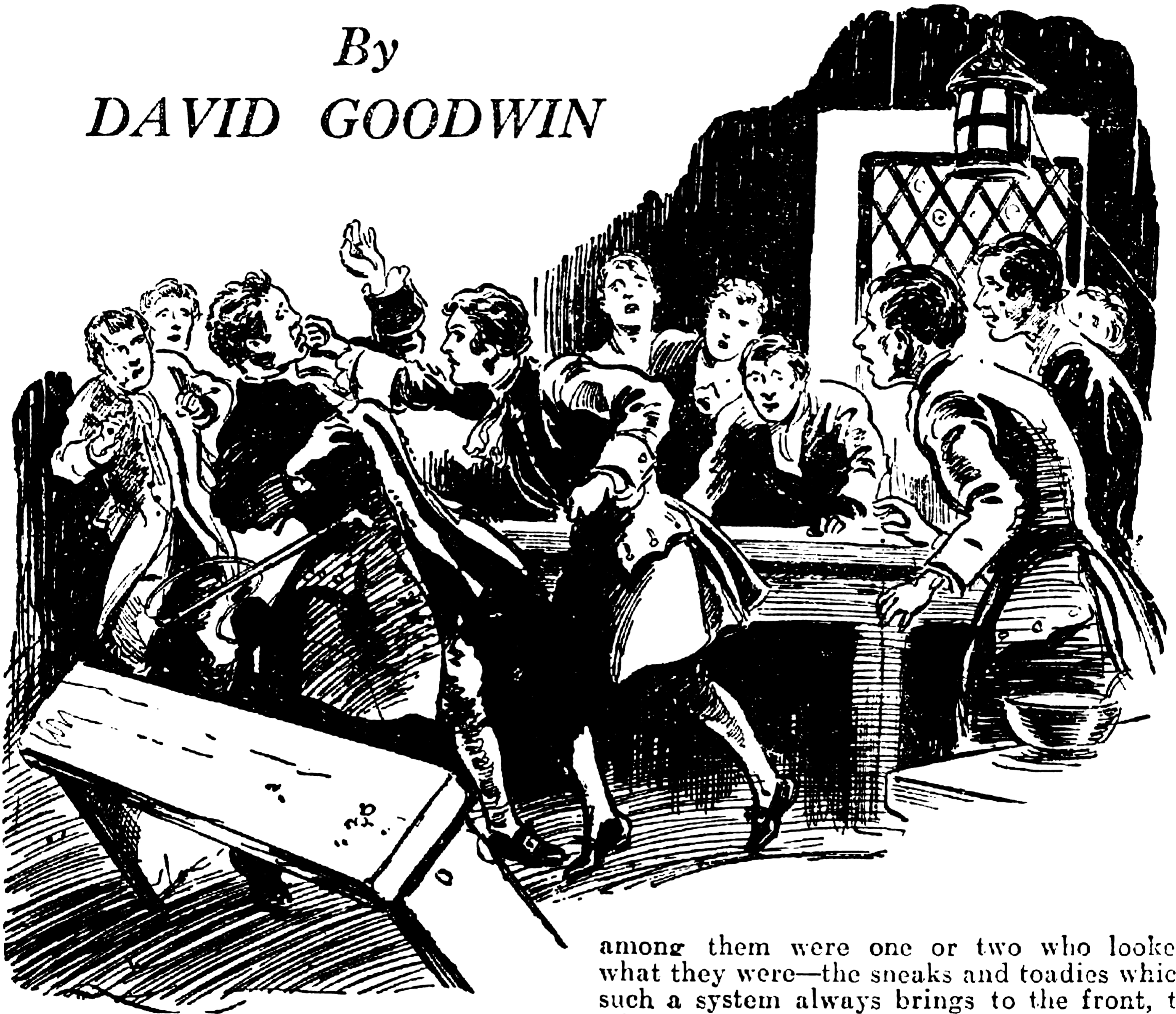
A few minutes later, looking very savage and discomfited, the two youths from Banterbridge Academy and their gymnastic instructor, who staggered along holding his chin, went in search of their motor-boat, which by this time had drifted out of sight,

(Continued on page 43.)

More Rousing Chapters of Our Stirring Adventure Serial!

Knights of the Road!

By
DAVID GOODWIN



Ralph Forrester's First Lesson in Pain!

As they entered the Common-room, Ralph looked about him in amazement and disgust. The room was filthy—its once white-washed walls were foul with grime, spiders and cobwebs. A few crazy benches and desks formed all the furniture, but the inmates were yet more woeful than the room.

There were twenty or thirty of them, all wretched-looking and underfed. Many were little better in appearance than Ben Garret. There was a hunted, nervous look in the eyes of some, while others wore the dull, listless air of those who are used to continual unhappiness and ill-treatment.

A few, including a small, red-haired boy, still seemed to have some spirit left, and

Duncansby School is a place for boys who are . . . "not wanted"—and that's why young Ralph Forrester is a pupil there!

among them were one or two who looked what they were—the sneaks and toadies which such a system always brings to the front, to win a little softer time for themselves by helping persecute the others. There was nobody in charge, and the boys crowded round Ralph.

"What's your name? What dormitory are you put in? Are you going to have any holidays?"

All these questions and a dozen others were fired at Ralph, but above them rose one that easily took the lead:

"Have you got anything to eat?"

A scornful laugh followed this, as if the idea were absurd. But Ralph had in his coat-pocket a couple of large packages of home-made hardbake that his father's old housekeeper at Fernhall had given him when he left. The sight of the hungry-looking urchins filled him with pity; he brought out both his packets and distributed them.

He was almost aghast to see the wolfish way the boys fell upon the sticky stuff and devoured it, much more anxious to get it inside them than to linger over the flavour. It was all gone in a twinkling.

"You're a good fellow, Forrester! Have you any more? No? Never mind, you're a fine fellow! Send for some? No, that's no good. Alick gets everything."

"They'll soon have those fine clothes off you," said a squeaky voice from a lank, big-boned boy. "An' a good thing, too. We don't want fellows putting on airs here!"

"There's your supper, Forrester," said Ben Garret's hoarse voice, as he brought in an earthen bowl holding a little sour skilly. "They told me to bring it in here. What's wrong? Ain't you hungry?"

Ralph gazed at the mouldy-looking stuff in astonishment, and turned away.

"Thank you, Ben," he said, "not for me. I wouldn't give that stuff to a dog!"

"Give it me! Give it me!" cried a dozen voices, and a rush was made for the porridge-pot.

But before they could seize it the headmaster's son entered the room, and, seeing what was happening, he lashed into the rioters with his riding-whip.

"Get back, you scum!" he shouted. "Let that alone! What, you again, Penfold? Come here!"

He distributed a dozen cuts with the whip, and, seizing the red-headed boy by the neck, beat him savagely, and flung him away.

"Do you see that?" he said, flourishing the riding-whip. "You'll feel that better than a tawse, my beauties! Where's the new boy? Bring him out!"

He turned to Ralph, who showed pretty plainly by his looks what he thought of the schoolmaster's son.

"What's your name?"

"Ralph Forrester."

"Is that the way to speak to your betters?" said Alick. "Ralph Forrester what?"

"Ralph Forrester of Fernhall," replied the new boy, not understanding.

"Oh, indeed!" said Alick, with an air of vast politeness. "Then, Mr. Ralph Forrester of Fernhall, will you do me the service to tie up my shoe-lace?"

He put his ponderous foot up on a form, and Ralph, though rather surprised, com-

plied. Despite his "proud stomach," there was no more obliging boy than Ralph if he were asked to do a service civilly, and he did not see that he was being made a fool of.

"Not so bad," said Alexander, when the lace was tied. "And now, do you see that daub of mud on the side of the shoe?"

"Yes," replied Ralph.

"Then lick it off!"

Ralph flushed to the roots of his hair, and he stood upright, his eyes flashing dangerously at the insult.

"Do you hear me?" cried Alexander sharply. "Lick it off! No? We'll see about that!"

He clutched Ralph's neck with his right hand and forced the boy's head down to his shoe. But with a quick wrench Ralph tore himself free. Eyes blazing, he struck his tormentor full in the face with all his force.

Alick staggered back, gasping. Then, purple with fury, he rushed at the boy and dealt a shower of blows at him, most of them foul. But Ralph's blood was up, and for the first time in his life Alexander found a boy to stand up to him.

Ralph was terribly punished, but he fought like a demon. Finding he was getting several returns for what he gave, Alexander called for aid.

"Brown! Simpson! Come and grab the brat!" he cried.

The big-boned boy and another with towy hair, both of whom were toadies of the schoolmaster's son, added themselves to the affray, and all three bore down on Ralph and overpowered him. Delicate as he was, there was not a grain of cowardice in all Ralph's body. He fought and struggled madly. His strength was not equal to his pluck, but the courage of the thoroughbred was in him, and for pain and punishment he cared not a jot so long as he could strike a blow.

"Get him down! Pluck his legs away! Stamp on him!" panted his assailants; and they came to the floor in a tangled heap, Ralph underneath.

Once there they set to work to revenge themselves on him by every cruel and cowardly trick the boys were capable of, and though every now and then a yelp from one of the enemy would show that Ralph was still resisting, the boy's wind and strength soon gave out, and while he lay exhausted he was

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle,

VANE FORRESTER. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

DICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, and, after bidding Ralph to be of stout heart and promising to fetch him soon, the two ride away. They have many stirring adventures together until Dick leaves his companion and rides north to see how his brother is faring. In the meantime, Ralph has reached Duncansby School, a dreary, desolate place on the wild moorlands. Unknown to him, Vane has arranged with the headmaster that the boy shall "not live long." A starved-looking lad named Ben Garret tells Ralph he is wanted in the Common-room, and thither they wend their way.

(Now read on.)

kicked and beaten and bruised till his conquerors were tired.

"Give him something for a finishing touch!" cried Alexander viciously. "Where's that skilly?"

"Here you are! He won't touch it," cried the toadies.

"Dainty, is he? Then here goes to feed him!" snarled Alick; and he flung half the skilly over Ralph's face and rubbed it in, and crammed the rest down his neck.

"There, Mr. Forrester of Fernhall!" said Alick, rising and throwing the empty bowl across the room. "You've had your lesson, and you've got your supper, and now you may crawl to bed! Off with you, all the rest, and get to your dormitories!"

The room emptied quickly, and with one final savage kick in the side, Ralph was left alone. How long he lay there he hardly knew, but gradually consciousness came back to him, and he sat up slowly.

He crept out of the room and made his way painfully to the dark-looking cell—for it was little more—that had been pointed out to him as his "apartment." Too dazed and sick to know or care what became of him, he lay down in the dirty, damp truckle-bed in the corner, just visible through the gloom, and for a time, at least, sleep overcame him and blotted out his troubles.

It was dark when he awoke, and everything was quiet. As soon as he remembered where he was, all his troubles came back into his mind. He was hot and feverish, racked with pain; his temples throbbed, and the palms of his hands were hot and dry.

Hardly knowing what he meant to do, Ralph felt his way to the door. It was not locked. He opened it, and crept into the passage.

Escape—and Pursuit!

THE house was as still as death. Ill though he felt, the brain still lived unconquered in the tormented body, and danger sharpened his wits. At all costs he must get away before those brutes came for him again.

Ralph found his way to the kitchen. All the doors of the house were barred and

bolted, of course. But there were no bars outside the small window in the scullery, as he found after he had examined all the others. He was surprised to find any way out at all. Surely no one would stop in that den of cruelty and wrong if they could escape? But there was one reason he did not know of, and which he was very soon to learn to his cost.

He slid the catch, opened the window, and slipped out, closing the exit quietly. Across the grass he stole, and his spirits rose as he left the dark house behind.

He passed by a small, black, shed-like structure, when suddenly something sprang out with a fearful growl and made a leap at him. Ralph barely saved himself by an inch or two, for he heard a heavy chain draw tight, and the clash of a pair of jaws. Some large animal was straining to get at him, and, dashing ahead as fast as he could, he only just escaped another.

"Mastiffs," thought Ralph. "What brutes! They keep them to hunt down run-aways, of course!"

Finding themselves balked of their prey, the great hounds made the night echo with their furious baying. Ralph took to his heels and ran for his life—he knew the pursuers would soon be after him.

Away he went, struggling through a thick-set hedge, and on across the purple moor. A wild delight seized him, fevered as he was, to feel the free air round him, the spring of the heather underfoot.

"Free!" he cried. "Free once more!"

And then reasoning came to him amid the joy of his new-found freedom. His escape would quickly be discovered. They would come after him; were certain to. Therefore he must reserve all his energies for the stern task before him. Shouting, as he had been doing, was a waste of breath. He needed all his wind for running. So he shut his lips tight and ran onwards in silence.

He settled down to a steady trot. The sky in the east was suffused by a faint, roscate glow—a sign of the fast approaching dawn. On and on he ran, his one aim to put as great a distance between himself and the place which threatened to make his life a misery, as possible. His breath was coming in gasps now, but pluckily he kept plodding on.

Yet soon his heart grew heavy within him. His happiness, his triumph in escaping changed to a feeling of despair. Behind him he could hear a faint clamour—and the noise grew louder and louder; nearer and nearer. The baying of the hounds had aroused the inmates of Duncansby School. They were on his track already!

(Will Ralph be re-captured? Next week's absorbing instalment of this grand serial tells you—don't miss reading it.)

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keep your copy of the NELSON LEE prominently displayed. Representatives of the Old Paper are visiting all the principal seaside resorts, and if they see that you are a reader you will

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THE HIKERS

(Continued from page 39.)

Bloop turned to Mr. Slivey.

"What brought you here?" he asked.

"Revenge!" replied Mr. Slivey frankly. "I objects to having tomatoes in my eye, and I was going to take it out of you coves somehow."

"What made you change your mind about getting your own back?" next questioned Bloop.

"Well, I may be a bit of a rascal, but I'm a sport, too," said Mr. Slivey, "and when I see a growed-up man and two others almost

full-growed men settin' on you three, I jolly well couldn't stand it."

Bloop produced his wallet, which luckily was a water-proof affair, and took out a couple of pound notes.

"Couldn't you make it three considerin' I've ruined my best pair o' trousers sitting on that wet bloke?" said Mr. Slivey.

"I couldn't," said Bloop. "You're a terrible old rascal, Slivey, but you've done us a good turn."

Ten minutes after Mr. Slivey had gone, Tony missed his silver watch!

(The Hikers are up to their usual larks next week—look out for another breezy yarn featuring these three cheery lads.)

Tired and Thirsty?

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THE INVISIBLE WORLD!

(Continued from page 33.)

smoothly—and ablaze with dazzling light from stem to stern!

Bitterly I blamed myself during the battle that followed for ever doubting Mark's pluck. Axes and bullets were no good to him; he was fighting the menace with his own weapons!

From every point in the Meteor's hull staring blue-white flashes shone forth, like spokes from a hub, lighting the fantastic city, the jungle and the violet sky. In a solid body the Flying Devils swept down on it and, after luring them high above Xemos, Mark turned and plunged swiftly into the attacking mass.

It was not a fight—it was a massacre. Truly my wonderful friend had unleashed a terrible weapon to destroy these fiends of Lebanu. Pinned beneath the dead Devil, I watched the others swoop around the ship.

The blue lights deepened; a Devil burst into spluttering flames. Another, a third, one after the other—they were like moths falling into a lamp. Their bodies hissed and crackled; legs and wings shrivelled up, dropped off. Each in turn, as the electric rays played around them, flared blindingly, writhed for a moment, and came plunging into the silent jungle.

Within five minutes the attack of the Flying Devils was shattered; scorched out of

existence by unbelievable heat. In little spirals the Meteor dropped back to the jungle landing-place, and I whooped feebly when I saw Mark pelting through the pathway into the square.

We found old Onada hiding in the temple, scared but unhurt, and managed at last to persuade him to recall his people. Forty of them, at least, would never answer his call again, but gradually the rest trickled in from the jungle in little bunches, jabbering with fright and awe at the terrible battle they had witnessed.

Their joy at sight of us was marvellous to see, and as soon as they were assembled I threw my arm round Mark's slender shoulder, raised my hand and beckoned them towards us. Apparently they understood my meaning; for with a loud, exultant cry they hurried forward and threw themselves prostrate at our feet.

There were two Gods of Lebanu now!

And in front of the ruined temple, with our eyes turned across the jungle to the scarlet Burning Mountains, Mark and I swore an oath that we would never leave Lebanu until we had snapped the chains that held her—and the pygmy race that worshipped us reigned again in peace and happiness.

THE END.

(Tom and Mark are on the warpath in next Wednesday's full-o'-thrills yarn entitled: "Flames of Death!")

**THE WORLD'S
BEST CYCLE**

26
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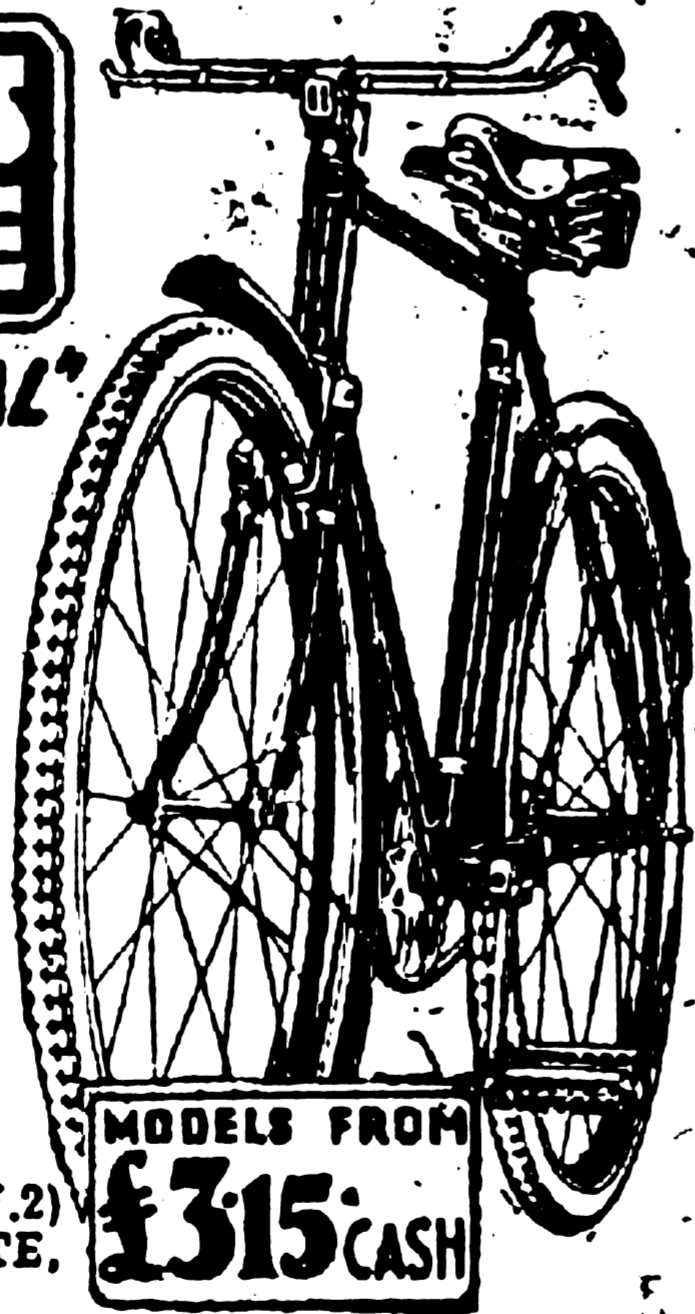
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